

PENGUIN  
BOOKS

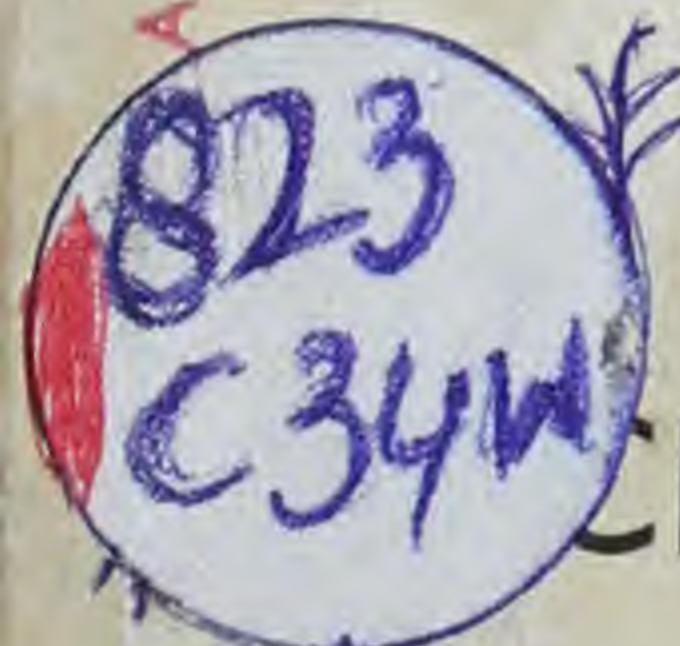
1696

ADVENTURE

# WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

ILLUSTRATED

SPENCER  
CHAPMAN



COMPLETE

UNABRIDGED



TRAVEL & ADVENTURE



Al. 53

COMPUTRIZED

E21F  
209

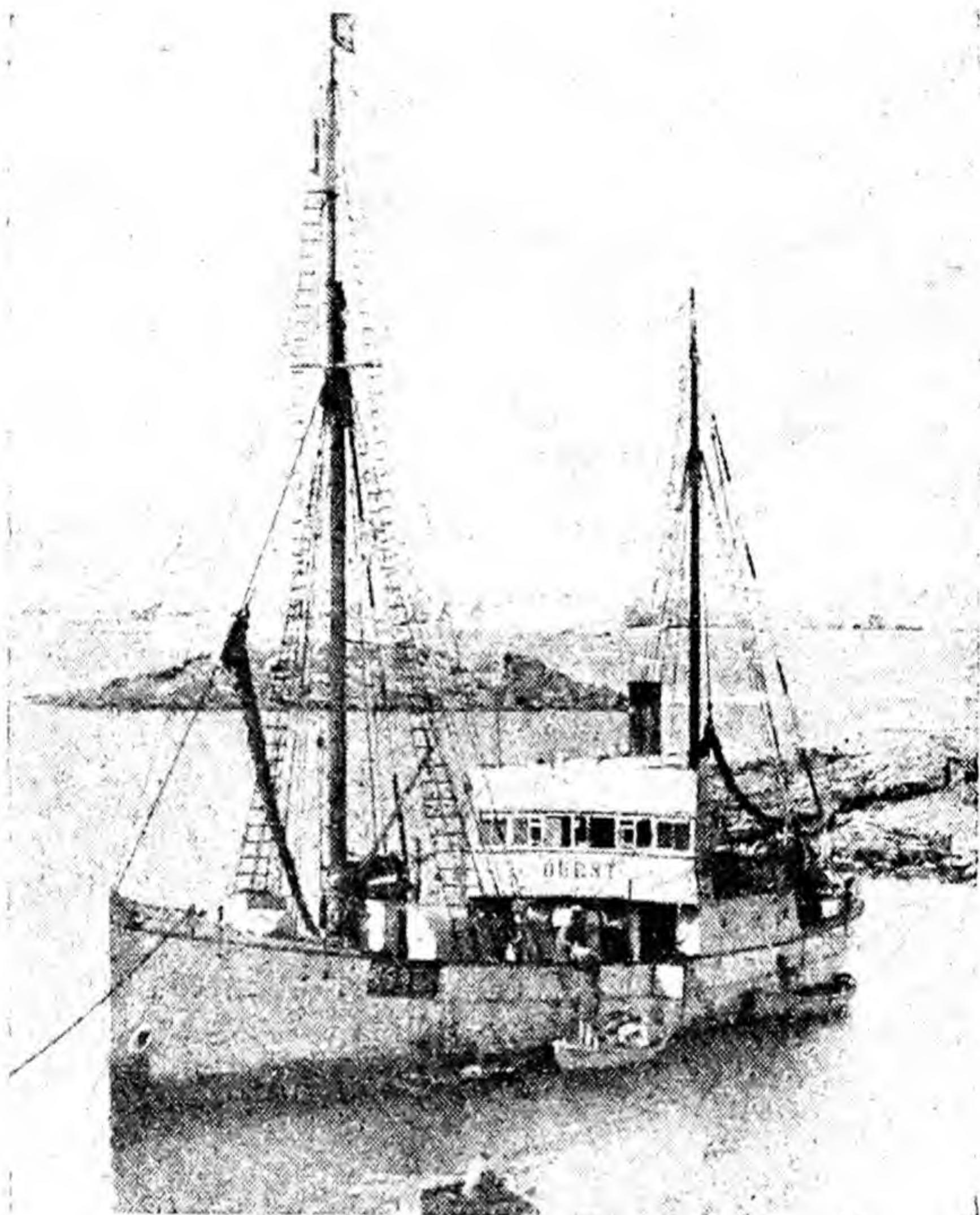
WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION  
BY F. SPENCER CHAPMAN



### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Readers not already on our mailing list who would like to know when new books are added to the Penguin Series, should write their name and address on a postcard, and post it to Penguin Books Ltd. Suggestions for new titles are welcome.





THE SHIP WE SAILED IN

# WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

BY

F. SPENCER CHAPMAN

*With an Introduction by*  
Augustine Courtauld

ILLUSTRATED



PENGUIN BOOKS LIMITED  
HARMONDSWORTH MIDDLESEX ENGLAND

First Published 1934  
Published in Penguin Books 1938

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
HAZELL, WATSON & VINEY, LTD., LONDON AND AYLESBURY

E21F  
207.

*This book is dedicated to  
Gino Watkins, Percy Lemon, Knud Rasmussen  
and Karali:  
Four who will long be remembered  
in East Greenland*





## CONTENTS

	PAGE
DISAPPOINTMENTS AND NEW PROJECTS . . . . .	18
WE VISIT SCORESBY SOUND . . . . .	31
THE TRAGEDY . . . . .	46
PERILOUS SEAS . . . . .	73
THE FLYING FAMILY COME TO GRIEF . . . . .	92
SETTLING IN FOR WINTER . . . . .	116
WINTER MONTHS . . . . .	169
A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE . . . . .	196
DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS . . . . .	221
HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK . . . . .	246
A MONTH ALONE . . . . .	264
STRANGE MEETINGS . . . . .	274
CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING . . . . .	289





## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE SHIP WE SAILED IN . . . . .	<i>frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
MARDA AND NANA: TWO MARRIED WOMEN FROM ANGMAGSSALIK . . . . .	97
THE "GERTRUD RASK" ENTERING LAKE FJORD . . . . .	101
KAYAK WITH A FULL LOAD . . . . .	105
KAYAKMAN WITH HUNTING EQUIPMENT . . . . .	109
RILEY CUTTING WATKINS' HAIR . . . . .	113
GROTESQUELY CARVED ICEBERGS . . . . .	117
RYMILL STEERING THE WHALE-BOAT . . . . .	121
THE FLYING FAMILY'S AEROPLANE SHORTLY BEFORE SINKING . . . . .	125
THE "STELLA" ANCHORED IN FRONT OF THE BASE . . . . .	131
THE CROSS . . . . .	135
HAULING IN THE FISHING NET . . . . .	139
EAST COAST SLEDGING WITH SINGLE TRACE . . . . .	143
THE BASE AFTER WINTER'S SNOWFALL . . . . .	147
LOOKING BACK OVER THE PACK-ICE TO AILSA . . . . .	151
FORCING A WAY UP THE FOOT OF THANK GOD GLACIER . . . . .	155
THE AUTHOR IN WATERPROOF KAYAK CLOTHES . . . . .	159
A HUNTER PULLING HIS KAYAK OUT ON TO AN ICE-FLOE . . . . .	161
KNUD RASMUSSEN ON BOARD THE "KIVIOQ" . . . . .	165
KARALI STEERING THE "STELLA" . . . . .	173



## INTRODUCTION

READING this book one lives again under the clear skies and among the happy people of that gaunt land; for it is the truth, the very life of Greenland, as it has been lived for more thousands of years than even ethnologists can number, as it is lived to-day. You will not find here the record of some grand expedition which, setting out towards a distant Pole with a large equipment of "ologists," brings forth its ponderous fruits in measured words and tables, nor will you discover some woeful tale grim with the suffering of disaster born of ignorance; what you will find is a plain account of a difficult piece of work well done, and how this small band of Englishmen lived among the Eskimo in the ways of the Eskimo and were proud to be accepted by them as of their sort.

They would be the first to admit that the objects of the Expedition, like most objects of most Expeditions, were the means of living the life they liked to live, rather than ends in themselves. With the little resources at their disposal many would have been content enough to do the job they were set and no more; while others might have thought it better to confine themselves entirely to prosecuting the art of living, a science of great exactitude in the North, finding no time for academic work. Yet again, others would have done neither but relied on the proceeds of their fertile imagination to fill the maw of a thirsty press with yet more untruths about the North. But they did none of these things. With their limited resources they carried out their programme of survey and meteorology; in addition to which they hunted their own food and made many notes on the beasts and birds and flowers and people, as you will find set forth in these pages. The problems of living off the country had largely been solved on the previous Expedition. This one served to put

## INTRODUCTION

those methods, learned with such pains, into practice. In its straightforward language, in its sincere expression of the author's thoughts, and in its description of the ways of one of the last of the good peoples of the earth, this story is one that anyone, from a boy to a bishop, can read with profit and understanding.

The years already begin to dim that winter journey when for over six weeks three of us, led by the author of this book, drove our dogs and ourselves to the summit of the Greenland Ice-Cap to reach two of our fellows. Time may pass, but the memory will never fade of that little tent we shared, the thoughts we shared, the fears we shared; how, during those dark fierce days of blizzard, when travel was impossible, he used to read in a clear tenor from one of our few small books, while the tent shook to the bass of the storm's accompaniment. On such a journey you learn the worth of a man.

So these four, the tempered core of the first Expedition, set out again. The leader died, and the other three carried on. To appreciate the difficulties of this situation you must realise that he was the best man of the lot, the brain of the whole enterprise; also that he was the best hunter, and they lived by hunting. You must also realise that for most Arctic work three is a minimum safe number, and one of the three had to stay at the Base to record the weather. That they came back with their work fully completed is worthy of our praise.

What is it they go for? What is the use of all this striving and straining? Why waste a young life on such a nebulous and fruitless task? Many ask these questions. None answers. If there is an answer, one must look in the eyes and know the hearts of those "who have done and must do more." There is much talk of the spirit of adventure; but Gino would say that, on a well-run Expedition, there should be no adventures, and if there were he would not speak of them. He went neither for adventure nor for fame, nor for

## INTRODUCTION

science, but because he wanted to do what he did. It was the life he loved. If there is little about him in these pages it is because he died so soon. Such is the way with men of his spirit who cannot accept defeat when their plans fall, who ask no help where none is offered. He knew the danger of his lonely hunting and loved it. Food had to be got, the risks had to be taken. So, as you read on in this book, you will find enough of risk and danger, not sought for but, when it came, accepted and dealt with calmly. Of fear, too, there was enough. Many times it must have taken their hearts in its cold grip, though afterwards they would laugh it out of sight.

Whether the Northern Air-route will ever come into being is a difficult question to answer. So much depends on pounds and dollars and other things beyond the control of mere wandering men. That it is feasible is the opinion of many, not least among whom is Colonel Lindbergh, who has flown over it himself and who is among those whose kindness towards the Expedition is mentioned in the book. Among the many others who helped two names are outstanding. One is Captain Ejnar Mikkelsen, who now has charge of the East coast of Greenland. He has done more work in the North than any living man, and it was through him that these fellows were enabled to have a house to live in and at least some European food to eat. The other great name is that of Dr. Knud Rasmussen who died last year. He was almost a god to all the Eskimos from Alaska to Angmagssalik. His great charm brought him affection from everyone with whom he met. It was only to him that the Eskimo would tell their inmost secrets and darkest superstitions, some of which he has recorded in his delightful books.

No one better than the author could have been chosen to write this account because, among his other qualifications, he was the best at the language of the people, that important and so often neglected field of knowledge among travellers.

## INTRODUCTION

One dares to hope that he will become a successor to Knusi, as Rasmussen is known to them, in recording the strange old beliefs and philosophy of the Eskimo before they too are submerged in Western ways. It is not with the dry pen of a scientist that the author writes, for he sees these things with a poet's eye and records them with an idealist's enthusiasm.

Yet this picture of life on the Greenland coast and of these Stone-age people of such endearing simplicity does not put in the expression, nor is it the highly coloured masterpiece of a word-painter; rather should it be likened to a perfect photograph in the accuracy of its detail and the vivid clarity of its focus. Read this book and you will know something of the life of that fantastic land, of its ascetic nakedness, of its strong weather, of its laughing people and of the feelings of an impetuous Englishman who has lived there. To know more: throw away your job, your friends, your cares, beg a quarter the money you will need and buy an eighth the food you will eat, learn the language and go there; not as a great white man to teach, but as an inferior to learn from these people something of their way of life: how to get a living from their barren country, how to share as they share, to endure as they endure, to live for the day caring nothing for the morrow, as they have done since before the time when we were painted blue.

AUGUSTINE COURTAULD.

Quem Mortis timuit gradum,  
qui siccis oculis monstra natantia,  
qui vidit mare turbidum et  
infames scopulos Acroceraunia ?

September 1934.

HASSAN. *And what of that to you or me, your Golden Journey to Samarkand?*

ISHAK. *I am leaving this city of slaves. . . . I have broken my lute and will write no more qasidahs in praise of the generosity of kings. I will try the barren road, and listen for the voice of the emptiness of earth. And you shall walk beside me.*

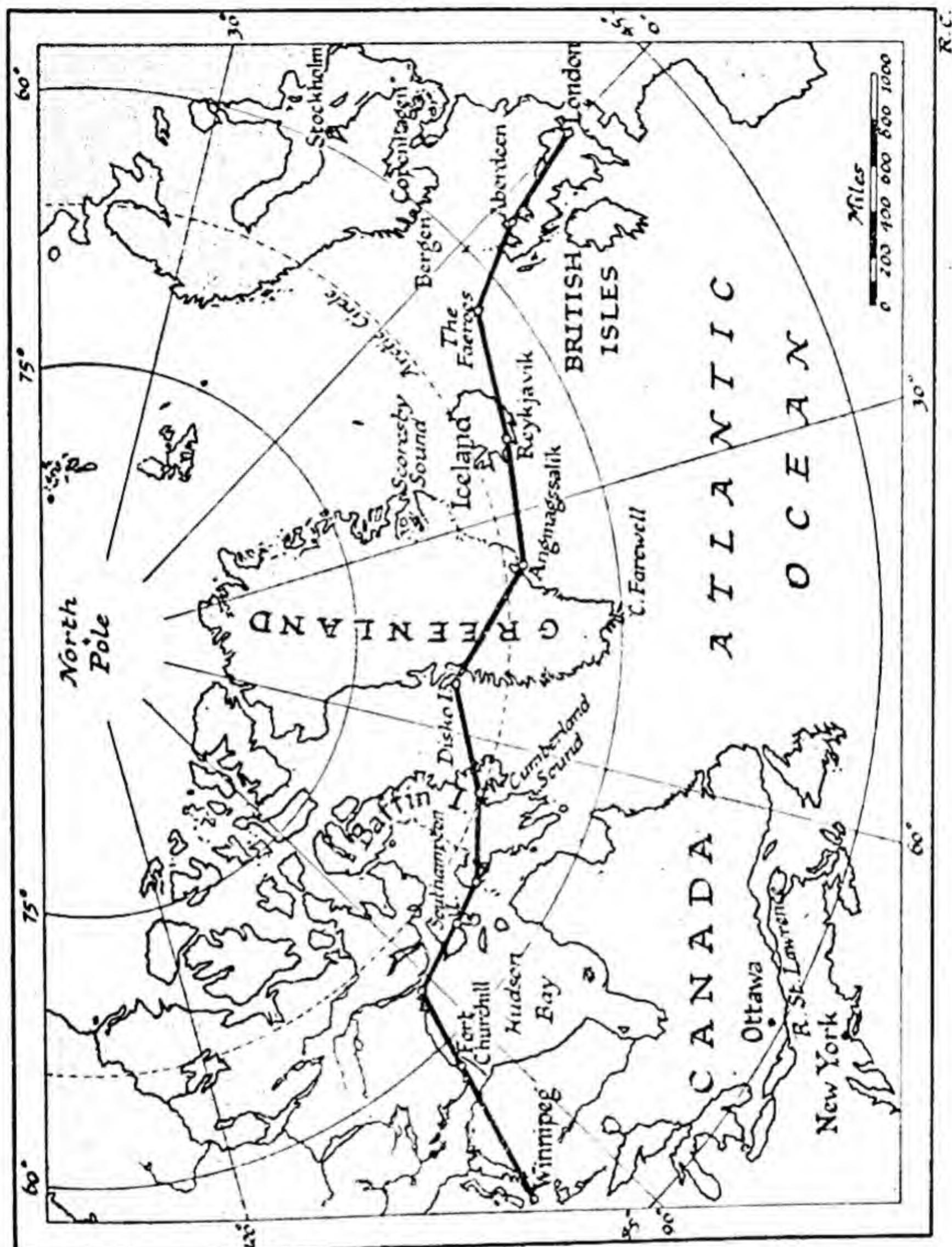
J. E. FLECKER

## CHAPTER I

### DISAPPOINTMENTS AND NEW PROJECTS

IN August 1931, when the fourteen members of the British Arctic Air-Route Expedition were ready, after many vicissitudes, to leave Greenland, Watkins already had several plans for the future. We did not all return together. Two parties crossed the Greenland Ice Cap to the West Coast, returning by ship from there, while Watkins himself undertook his epic small-boat survey journey down six hundred miles of one of the most dangerous coasts in the world. I got back to England earlier than he did and had been instructed to find out how the land lay for the two future expeditions he had planned.

If sufficient money were available he intended to go to the Antarctic and to sledge right across the South Polar plateau from the Weddell Sea to the Ross Sea, with the primary object of finding out if Antarctica is one continent or two. Aeroplanes would probably have to be taken and the whole expedition would cost many thousands of pounds. If it should prove impossible to get the necessary support for this expedition, the alternative plan was that Watkins, Rymill and myself should go right round the Arctic with kayak and dog-sledge. For men keen on hunting and winter travelling this was a most entrancing project. Starting in autumn from Wager Inlet, in Labrador, we would sledge up Hudson Bay when the freeze-up came, cut across the barren lands to the Mackenzie delta—living off the country *en route*—travel right along the north coast of Canada and Alaska, then over the Bering Straits to Siberia. During the dark months we would stop and winter wherever we happened to be, travelling once again when daylight returned. Kayaks would be carried on the sledges for



## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

hunting in the summer months. Following the Siberian coast as far as Cape Chelyuskin we would continue through little-known Nicolas II Land to Franz Joseph Land, then finally across to Spitsbergen. The whole journey would take about three years and would result in the mapping of many previously inaccessible and unknown parts of the Arctic.

The geographers and explorers at home considered this plan too diffuse in operation, and doubted if we would get permission to traverse the Russian sector as the Soviet Government were working there themselves. But they were unanimously enthusiastic about the plans for the Antarctic journey. There had been no British Expedition to these parts for many years, and in order to substantiate our claims there such an expedition seemed a necessity in view of the increasing activity of American and Norwegian explorers. Moreover, in spite of the industrial depression, which was then at its very worst, everybody seemed to think that the money for an Antarctic Expedition would be forthcoming. So Arctic plans were reluctantly given up.

Out in Greenland we had felt that we should have no difficulty in conveying our enthusiasm to those at home with money and influence. When we got back, however, although we found everybody full of encouragement and hope, alas, after several months no money was forthcoming.

Watkins elaborated his plans: with Rymill, Riley and myself he intended to be landed in the Weddell Sea, then to sledge right across the Antarctic Continent to the Ross Sea, where we would be met by another ship and taken home. Thus would be solved the last great geographical mystery.

Many explorers have written of the intolerable period of reaction between expeditions. In our case we returned to civilisation full of enthusiasm and optimism, after a year of glorious life, to find a cynical, damping world, peopled mainly with business men, whose outlook was entirely different from our own. There were other difficulties too.

## DISAPPOINTMENTS AND NEW PROJECTS

Out in Greenland we had led a life of complete freedom, hunting and contriving with all the joy of a Robinson Crusoe, and at the same time feeling that our work was of real value. Everything we did had some tangible object: if we shot a seal or a seagull, we had it boiled for supper; a short sledge journey might disclose new mountain ranges; a captured insect might be new to science. But in England, after the joy of the first long-looked-forward-to bath and the reunion with old friends, everything tended to fall flat.

Life's city ways are dark,  
Men mutter by. . . .

In the first place the change to civilisation affected our health: two of us got a strange and rare rash called *piterias rosea* which is attributed solely to change of diet.<sup>1</sup>

Personally, I find the greatest difficulty in getting any sleep for the first week after returning to England; after living so long for one object, more or less, life suddenly becomes so terribly complicated.

In many ways the year between the two Greenland expeditions was a year of disillusionment. For Watkins particularly, vainly hoping for money, it was agonising. In addition to this the last expedition was considerably in debt, and Watkins and I were lecturing and writing to pay off this debt, while Riley was acting as secretary. All through the winter and spring Watkins tried every conceivable source in order to raise the necessary money, until at last about May it became obvious that it would not be possible to go to the Antarctic that year. This was a terrible disappointment, as our advisers had at first been so confident that the money would be forthcoming that Watkins had by then given up the idea of returning to the Arctic, an alternative which would have been far less expensive.

At this stage Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Arctic adviser to

<sup>1</sup> After the 1932-33 Greenland expedition we all went down with German measles within a week of our return.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

Pan-American Airways, offered Watkins £500 to take a party again to East Greenland to do a further year of meteorological work and general investigations of the flying conditions.

Although this would mean a less important expedition it would at any rate give us a year's more experience and would keep us employed till conditions in England improved sufficiently to allow more chance of money being raised for work in the Antarctic. None of the four of us intended to remain in England waiting idly for more auspicious times; nor would it be easy to get jobs which could be left at a moment's notice when that time should come.

There were other compensations too; we had all enjoyed the last expedition so much that it seemed to many of us that no future year could ever be so wonderful. To return to the same district and to the same Eskimos whom we knew so well would be joy indeed. For my part I had just started to work over my ornithological notes of the year before and had found all sorts of problems which would be largely elucidated by another year's work.

To supplement the American offer, the Royal Geographical Society voted a further £200 towards the survey side of the expedition, as well as lending survey instruments, while the Meteorological Office lent all meteorological instruments. *The Times* newspaper also promised us a grant of about £100 in return for press rights. Watkins thus had £800 to get four of us to and from East Greenland, to keep us housed and fed there for a year, and to buy dogs, dog-food, sledges, boats and all necessary equipment. The British Arctic Air-Route Expedition had cost at least £13,000.

In August 1930 we had entered in the *Quest* a little-known fjord which we named Lake Fjord, because of a large lake less than a mile from the head of the fjord. So suitable is this stretch of water for aircraft that in 1930 we had carried up a depot of petrol and sledging rations in order that it

## DISAPPOINTMENTS AND NEW PROJECTS

could be used as an advance flying base from our main station 120 miles to the south.

The meteorological results from Lake Fjord would be doubly valuable since 1932 was to be a Polar Year, when similar observations would be taken at the same moment at many places in the Arctic, including Angmagssalik and Scoresby Sound on the east coast of Greenland.

The general plan of the expedition was as follows: we would go out in July in the Danish ship which sails once a year from Copenhagen to Angmagssalik, the chief Danish-Eskimo settlement in East Greenland; having arrived there we would have to take all our equipment and dogs the odd hundred miles to Lake Fjord by motor boat and umiak (a large Eskimo boat consisting of sealskins stretched over a light wood framework; it is usually rowed by the women). If the ice conditions were anything like what they had been at the same time of the year in 1930 and 1931, this would entail several hazardous journeys, and would take up most of the summer. Once we reached Lake Fjord, Watkins would start seal-hunting, Riley would establish the meteorological station, while Rymill and I were to continue the ferry work. As we could only afford to take what food certain British firms were good enough to give us, we would have to spend a great deal of our time hunting to get meat for ourselves and the dogs. The weather observations would be kept throughout the year, while in the autumn and spring we hoped to do a fairly large-scale local survey, extending it by sledge journeys as far as possible into the mountains. We also hoped to climb Mount Forel, which dominates a mountainous area about 50 miles south-west of Lake Fjord. While Rymill and I were doing the sledge journeys in the spring, Watkins intended to sledge down to the Base of the 1930-31 expedition, 30 miles west of Angmagssalik, and then to cross the Ice Cap to Godhaab on the West Coast. He would have to do this alone as no one else would be available. The object of this journey was to send our

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

meteorological results to Pan-American Airways at the earliest possible date, so that if they wished they would have time to get another expedition ready to reach Angmagssalik as soon as ice conditions allowed in the following year. This information could be sent from the West Coast, which becomes navigable several months before the East.

The negotiations with America were not completed till June 4th: the ship, the *Gertrud Rask*, would leave Copenhagen on July 14th. This left Watkins little more than a month to get everything ready. At last, on July 11th, we crossed from Harwich to Esbjerg and next day were in Copenhagen. The peaceful sea voyage was a wonderful change after the rush and turmoil of London.

To one who has been long in city pent  
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair  
And open face of heaven—

Setting off on an expedition one has a delightful feeling of relaxation and expectancy: behind one, probably a year of disappointed hopes and indecision, culminating in a frantic rush to get everything ready in time; before one, a return to the simple life, no letters to answer, no newspapers, no tiresome engagements to keep,—only any amount of strenuous but congenial work with companions whose outlook is similar to one's own.

June 14 found us steaming out of the Skager Rak in the *Gertrud Rask*, with our old friend, Captain Tving, in command. The *Gertrud Rask*, a four-masted steam schooner of some 300 tons, between her regular visits to the more civilised and accessible west coast of Greenland, makes one trip each year to Scoresby Sound and Angmagssalik, the two Danish-Eskimo settlements on the East Coast, with provisions for the year. Apart from this single visit of the ship, which may be prevented by adverse ice conditions, these settlements—except for wireless communication—are normally cut off from the rest of the world. However, in

## DISAPPOINTMENTS AND NEW PROJECTS

the last few years, largely owing to the dispute between Denmark and Norway over the possession of parts of this coast, almost every summer at least one expedition ship would enter either Angmagssalik or Scoresby Sound harbours, and this year the district promised to be comparatively populous.

We represented a varied collection of nationalities and interests that summer evening as, leaving Copenhagen behind us, we moved past Hamlet's castle of Elsinore and away into the North Sea. There was the Dutch Polar Year Expedition, a party of four young scientists, who were going to spend the year at Angmagssalik, and a Dutch biologist and his wife who were attached to this Expedition; a Danish nurse for Angmagssalik—this was a new experiment; a Danish lady who was conducting some seismographic experiments at Scoresby Sound; a Danish artist—these last two would return with the ship in August; and six Greenlanders<sup>1</sup>—one of whom was to act as assistant to the wireless operator at Scoresby Sound.

As well as the passengers we had a consignment of pigs and fowls for the Danish officials at Scoresby Sound and Angmagssalik, also two Alsatian dogs, which Rymill had brought out as an experiment to see how they would compare with the Eskimo dogs.

Soon we struck bad weather, so much so that we were driven south of the Shetlands whereas we had intended to go to the north. Riley, being a very bad sailor, had retired below at an early stage in the voyage; though he was loath to miss the wonderful meals the ship provided. He was soon followed by the rest of the expedition, though it was almost worse in bed, where continuous muscular effort was required to counteract being hurled from side to side of the bunk, or even on to the floor, with each sickening lurch and roll of the ship. I note in my diary that the conversation had

<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants of the West Coast, having a varied proportion of Danish blood, are known as Greenlanders, as opposed to the pure Eskimos of the East Coast and other places.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

already fallen to expedition level and that our cabin was so untidy and congested that before we could get into our bunks all our gear had to be piled up on the floor—an unsteady heap of ruc-sacks, kitbags, guns, books and cinematograph apparatus.

At last the cloud-capped Faroe Islands loomed into view. Magnificent cliffs rose two thousand feet into the clouds, while the sunshine lit up misty fjords with patches of quick green which seemed to hang on the precipitous hill-sides, the abode of a myriad sea-birds whose droppings whitened the sombre rock for miles. Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Kittiwakes, Razorbills, Guillemots, Puffins and Fulmar Petrels flew continuously to and fro.

That night, inevitably (hopes ran high now that the sea was calmer) we spoke of future expeditions. Watkins had always hankered after his early love, Labrador, where he had first experienced that fascinating chequer-work of grim struggle and relaxation, of alternate hunger and satiety, which make up an Arctic winter. I remember conversation then turned to Everest, and we discussed the value of employing more Arctic methods to besiege that sentinel peak.

Some years the *Gertrud Rask* calls at Isafjord in north-west Iceland to coal, on her way from the one Eskimo settlement to the other; but on this voyage she would coal first at Seydisfjord on the east coast of Iceland, then visit Scoresby Sound before dropping us at Angmagssalik. Although this meant that we would start a few days later, we were well pleased as none of us had yet visited this daughter colony to the north.

July 21st found us steaming up Seydisfjord, where steeply terraced hills rose from tiny villages by the sea-board to disappear mysteriously in the mist, making them seem much higher than the three thousand feet that they really are.

We saw a school of small whales playing in the still shore-water and suddenly the dark head of a seal appeared ahead of us—I think that we four were far more excited than the

## DISAPPOINTMENTS AND NEW PROJECTS

Greenlanders at this first sight of the very essence of life in the Arctic. Soon we anchored by the village of Seydisfjord, with its brightly painted houses scattered round the head of the fjord: an important village this, since the cable line connecting Reykjavik with the rest of Europe leaves Iceland at this point.

While the others visited the shops I borrowed a bicycle from the postmaster and went off into the hills to collect plants and watch birds; happy as only an indifferent sailor can be, enjoying the first day on land after a rough voyage. With the Arctic Skuas harrying the Terns above the clear water of the fjord and the Golden Plovers piping in the hills, the present was ecstasy enough, while the prospect of the future year in the company of three tried companions in a land more attractive to me than any other, was enough to make one shout with joy.

The clouds were still low over the hill-tops as we left Seydisfjord that same evening and soon crossed the Arctic circle. We celebrated the occasion by returning to seal-skin boots and anoraks (the anorak is a close-fitting blouse-like garment with a hood that can be pulled up over the head: it is the usual dress in Greenland).

On July 23rd we encountered ice. It was foggy at the time, and the low masses of milky-green ice looked singularly unimpressive as the dun waves washed over them. The east coast of Greenland has always had a deservedly bad reputation for inaccessibility due to the pack-ice, which often excludes all ships till late in the autumn. But for the last five years the pack has been so open that it seems as if we are passing through a period of good ice years which may or may not be lasting.

As a rule storms to the north of Greenland and in the Polar Basin break up and liberate the masses of pack-ice whose cohesion has been already weakened by the summer thaw. This ice, with occasional scattered icebergs from the great glaciers of Greenland, influenced by the main stream of the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

Polar current, sweeps down the coast sometime during October or November, and, blanketing the stormy waters of Denmark Strait, gives the inner fjords a chance to freeze over. The ice, tightly packed against the coast, but usually prevented by wind and tide from actually filling the fjords, may stretch for more than a hundred miles out to sea. Usually about November this moving sea of ice is arrested in its progress by the water freezing around it, and unless it is broken up by the winter gales it remains more or less stationary till the summer of the following year. Regulated by the ferocity of the gales in the far north, the amount and the movement of the pack-ice is extraordinarily variable. Sometimes it fails to appear at all, and then all winter the storm-troubled seas are unable to freeze over except in the more sheltered places. In June and July the warmth of the surface water and the direct heat of the sun disintegrate the ice, which once more moves southward, though it is sometimes well into August before a ship can penetrate to the coast.

This year seemed to be exceptionally ice free, and although the visibility was only a mile or two, we made our way right to the settlement without having to stop once. Every few hundred yards we saw a small berg the size of a cottage, but most of the ice was only a yard or so high and sparsely scattered. On some floes we saw large bladder-nosed seals resting, with cream-coloured necks, black heads and brown spotted bodies. Little Auks increased in number as we neared the coast, flying round in parties of 20 or 30, looking like Starlings or small waders. There were also flocks of Black Guillemots showing alternate black and white in their rolling flight. The large Brunnich's Guillemots, flying in regularly spaced lines, accentuated the diminutive size of the Little Auks, who crowded on to small floes in front of the ship waiting till the bows were almost on top of them before they scattered away and dived into the water.

Eventually, late in the evening, patches of snow-scattered coast loomed through the sunset-tinted fog, and we saw the

## DISAPPOINTMENTS AND NEW PROJECTS

silhouette of a few huts against a snowdrift. The Captain had seen no land since leaving Iceland, and as the weather had been mostly foggy he had been navigating by dead-reckoning and had come a little too far up the fjord. The two Eskimo hunters who came out to meet us in their kayaks told us we were at Cape Hope, a few miles beyond Amdrup's Havn, the main settlement.

*The vegetation of Jameson's Land (in Scoresby Sound) is superior to anything I could have expected in such a latitude. . . . The insects were numerous, consisting of mosquitoes, and several species of butterflies.*

*The heat among the rocks was most oppressive; so much so, that my excursion was greatly contracted, and my research limited, by the painful languor which the uncommonly high temperature produced . . . to my feelings it was equal to the greatest heat of summer in England.*

WILLIAM SCORESBY, JUNIOR. 1823.

## CHAPTER II

### WE VISIT SCORESBY SOUND

Now that the admirable Danish supervision at Angmags-salik has prevented those fearful famines which, as the result of a bad year's hunting, would wipe out at a blow whole families of Eskimos, the population, about 260 in 1884 when Gustav Holm first discovered the colony, has increased so much that they had doubled their numbers by 1923.

It became clear that the hunting resources alone of the Angmagssalik district could no longer support this growing population, and that they would then become dependent on European food, which would react most unfavourably on the character of a primitive and essentially a hunting people.

In 1922, the Danish explorer Ejnar Mikkelsen, with this in mind, tried to persuade the Greenland Government in Copenhagen to establish another colony at Scoresby Sound. Re-establish would be the more correct term; for the house-sites discovered by the Ryder expedition of 1890-91 proved that this part of the East Coast had at one time been quite densely populated, though the Eskimo family which Clavering discovered in Latitude 74° N., in 1823, are the only Eskimos who had ever been actually seen alive on the east coast of Greenland north of the Angmagssalik area. As the Greenland Government would not do this, a private company—the Scoresby Sound Committee—was formed, and in 1925 seventy Angmagssalik Eskimos and a few Greenlanders from the West Coast were settled at Amdrup's Havn, an inlet at the north-east of Scoresby Sound.

To begin with, Scoresby Sound proved a paradise for game. In the first winter alone 128 bears were killed and innumerable seals. As well as these there were herds

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

of walrus and narwhal, producing not only precious ivory for making hunting equipment, but any amount of dog food. But now the hunting has deteriorated, and once the novelty has worn off the people are beginning to be homesick for Angmagssalik.

On the morning after our arrival I got up very early and climbed the hill behind the settlement. Everything was very different from Angmagssalik: the church and store and other wooden buildings were on a barren stony slope where considerable drifts of snow still lay right down to sea level. Across a little creek, where a river came noisily from the hills, were the wireless station and a large new house which had just been put up for the French Polar Year Expedition, who were expected to arrive any day in the *Pourquoi Pas?*, with the famous French explorer Dr. Charcot.

It was exciting to look across the fjord, where the early morning fog still shrouded the pack-ice, to the high mountains and glaciers on the far side, and to think how many expedition ships had sailed or steamed up this Sound since William Scoresby the younger, a Scotch whaling captain, first discovered it in 1822.

For a naturalist this is a particularly interesting place, as many animals and plants flourish here which are not found on the more barren coast to the south: the musk ox, arctic wolf, arctic hare and lemming are found at Scoresby Sound, but not in the Angmagssalik district, which is five hundred miles further south.

As Watkins was very keen that I should get some shots of musk oxen for the expedition film, I started making enquiries at once to find out where these animals were to be found. An Eskimo, one of a type rather rare on the East Coast, who tells you exactly what he thinks you want him to, told me that he had seen musk oxen grazing a few days ago over towards Cape Hope; and looking ten miles or so across the bay I saw some dark specks which I was quite ready to believe were musk oxen. Accordingly after break-

## WE VISIT SCORESBY SOUND

fast I set off round the coast with a ruc-sack containing my Bell Howell standard size cinema camera, with four-inch and twelve-inch lenses for long-distance work, as well as a heavy tripod and a few hundred feet of film. It was a boiling hot day and the going was extremely rough.

Dwarf willows and birches grew to a height of a foot or two between the rough boulders. Masses of crowberry, bilberry and the red cranberry—which was new to me in Greenland—flourished on the more fertile slopes watered by the melting snow patches above. In a sheltered place I found several plants of the Iceland poppy, with the sun shining through its exquisitely transparent lemon-coloured petals, the sweet-scented *Pyrola uniflora*, and the ubiquitous purple saxifrage. There were not many birds; an occasional family of Snow Buntings flew by, twittering, and on a lake from which the ice had not yet all melted a pair of Red-throated Divers swam, making, every now and then, their peculiarly strident and mournful notes. A Greenland Wheatear cursed me as I climbed down the steep mountain side to the delta-like shingle flats which stretched across the head of the bay. Dunlin, Sanderling and Turnstone were here, and a pair of Ringed Plover indulging in a pathetic injury-feigning display to distract my attention from their almost full-grown young.

Here I came to a rushing torrent of sediment-grey glacier water, so swift that to cross it at all I had to ballast myself with two large boulders to prevent my feet getting swept from under me. Luxuriant masses of the cushioned pink and purple saxifrage made these flats a blaze of colour and at the same time served to hold the sandy soil together.

A solitary Glaucous Gull fished from a sandbank, while four magnificent black and white drake Eiders, with a single dowdy brown duck, swam away behind the grounded blue-green ice-floes. Many butterflies flew past; the sulphurous clouded yellow, and a type of brown fritillary closely allied

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

to our small pearl-bordered fritillary; while bumble bees buzzed along in the glorious sunshine.

Having walked about ten miles, only to discover that my dark objects were no musk oxen but a few solitary boulders, I left my heavy ruc-sack and walked back to the ship, intending to continue my search by kayak on the following day.

We spent the evening visiting the Danish wireless operator, the chief trader, who has magisterial powers in the district, and the missionary. These two last were Greenlanders.

Next day was again hot and sunny, though heavy fog still lay over the fjord mouth. I launched my kayak, but to begin with was so wobbly that I almost capsized. Watkins and Rymill unloaded theirs too, intending to practise a little kayak rolling.

The kayak is the light Eskimo hunting canoe, consisting of a framework of wood covered over with seal-skins. It is about eighteen feet long and only as many inches in width. The entrance to the kayak is by a circular manhole amidships through which the owner can barely force his hips. When wearing a waterproof seal-skin coat which fits tightly over the raised rim of the manhole and ties round the face and wrists, the skilful hunter can roll his kayak right round in the water, only his face getting wet. This rolling consists of letting the kayak go over till it is right upside-down, then with a special movement of the paddle, or even of the hand alone, coming up again on the other side. It is necessary to learn to roll the kayak before venturing out alone; indeed even expert hunters, owing to the extreme instability of the kayak, occasionally find themselves upside-down in the water. Many of us had learned this art so that we could avail ourselves of the most productive and exciting method of seal-hunting, Watkins himself becoming very expert. We had kayaked a little in England to keep our hands in, but were woefully out of practice: even experienced hunters have told me that when they have not been out kayaking for a

## WE VISIT SCORESBY SOUND

week or two it takes them some time to get into the way of it again, while most of the more complicated methods of rolling the kayak have to be relearned again each season.

I left the ship and kayaked across the bay to where I had hidden my cameras. It took me  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours instead of the 6 I had taken walking.

With my glasses I could still see no sign of musk oxen, so climbed a mountain to get a view over the low-lying land towards Hurry Inlet. On the way up I passed a small lake with masses of silky cotton-grass on the margin. A pair of Long-tailed Skuas nested here and swooped at me with furious screams. Some years they are very common. They live chiefly on lemmings, the small Arctic rodent which is sometimes present in thousands, but this year there were no lemmings, consequently skuas were rare; indeed these were the only ones I saw in the Sound. As the musk oxen did not seem to be this side of Hurry Inlet I decided to visit Cape Hope settlement and enquire of the Eskimos there. An hour's steady paddling brought me to the settlement. On the way there I shot half a dozen Guillemots from my kayak: I was very hungry by then, and looked forward to a good meal of seal-meat, a delicacy I had not tasted for almost a year.

As I approached the few wooden huts of the settlement I felt more and more excited. Though these Eskimos knew that the ship was here they did not know there were some Europeans aboard who could not only manage their kayaks but could speak the Angmagssalik dialect; and as I paddled up to the low stony shore and saluted them in the most colloquial phrases I could remember, it was amusing to see their expression of open-mouthed amazement, as if I had been a visitor from another world. These natives all had parents, brothers or sisters at Angmagssalik, and as they were rather homesick, questions were rained upon me: Where had I lived at Angmagssalik? Was old Yelmar still

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

alive? Had Salo and Mada any children yet? Who had Beda married?—and so on.

It was interesting to compare their way of life with that of their kinsmen with whom we had lived at Angmagssalik. Here they seemed outwardly much more civilised. All the houses except one were of wood, with a porch and glass windows. Inside, though they still retained the essentially Eskimo bed, consisting of a raised bench right across part of the room, they had a large square metal stove and a table. For food they offered me rye-bread and butter, and tea with sugar. This fare instead of the usual seal-meat was of necessity rather than choice. In the habitual happy-go-lucky way of Eskimo men the hunters had gone off in their kayaks as soon as the ship had come in, leaving the women to fend for themselves and to augment what food there was with berries and plants from the hills.

They told me piteous tales of such lack of seals that they rarely had enough meat and blubber for food, while skins of the larger seals were so scarce that there were only just enough to cover the kayaks, indeed some of them were covered with the skins of the small fjord seal. As a result they had no covers for their tents and umiaks, which caused a serious departure from their normal mode of life. In the summer they had to stay in their smelly houses instead of being able to put all their belongings in the umiak and go from place to place searching for seals or other food. A visit to the main settlement now entailed an eight-hour walk over very rough country instead of a cheerful row in the umiak across the bay.

They were interested to hear I was English, as they all remembered Tom Harris the palaeontologist, who had wintered at Scoresby Sound with Lauge Koch in 1926–7. My hostess told me how in the winter her husband had been out hunting on the sea-ice, when a sudden storm carried the ice out to sea. He had been away for five days, eventually

## WE VISIT SCORESBY SOUND

coming to land again right down by Cape Dalton. Beyond frost-bitten feet he was none the worse.

There was one hunter still here, a large bearded and moustached Eskimo called Neilsie, who lived with his wife and ten children in a more primitive house, with sod walls and a flat roof supported with driftwood props. Neilsie said that the musk oxen were in Jameson Land on the other side of Hurry Inlet and that he would accompany me there on the following day. His little wife, Katinka, gave me some extremely old seal meat while we had a wonderful gossip about all the latest Angmagssalik scandal. That night we had a dance in one of the huts. Six fat and muscular girls were provided, while I was the only man. The music was produced by an aged gramophone with a battered tin horn. There were twelve needles which were changed round every now and then for variety, and records so old that only one was recent enough for me to recognise. As the house was barely six feet high I turned in that night with a very sore head, but slept well enough under a musk ox skin on the floor.

Next morning at dawn Neilsie and I paddled off in our kayaks in search of the musk oxen. There was new ice on the sea in places and a chill wind till the heat of the sun dispelled the morning mists. We surprised a family of young Eider Ducks as we turned the corner into Hurry Inlet and started to cross. The pack-ice was rather dense here, including some large floes of unbroken bay-ice several hundred yards long. Further up the inlet the floating ice was refracted into the semblance of a huge glacier wall hundreds of feet high. We made for a gap in the line of mountains on the far side of the inlet, about a mile north of Cape Stewart.

After beaching our kayaks, Neilsie with an incredibly battered rifle and I with my ruc-sack started to climb up beside one of the streams flowing from the plateau of Jameson Land. On this well-drained south-facing slope wonderful flowers grew, clumps of harebells, yellow marigolds and most luxurious greenery. We stopped frequently to eat

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

handfuls of crowberry and bilberry. Suddenly I saw a solitary musk ox placidly grazing by the side of a stream half a mile or so away. The rare musk ox, really more of a sheep than an ox, though standing about four feet high at the shoulder, is found among the more northern Canadian Islands and in parts of north Greenland where pasture is sufficient. All too easy a prey to the Eskimos, who in their improvident way do not hesitate to kill off more than they need, it finds great difficulty in holding its own in spite of protection. The normal method of defence when attacked is for the herd to form into a ring with the bulls in the front and the calves in the middle. This is adequate protection against its only natural enemy, the arctic wolf, but is ill adapted for defence against man.

We did not disturb this musk ox, as we hoped to find a herd further on.

The interior of Jameson Land reminded me more of the Yorkshire moors than of any part of Greenland I had hitherto seen—great rolling hills, with pleasant streams draining the valleys. There were patches of snow in some places and the thaw water dripping from these nourished masses of flowers below.

We walked for some hours over Jameson Land, but as there seemed to be no large herds about we started to stalk a solitary old bull that we saw grazing by a stream. I had my cinema camera and four-inch lens ready while Neilsie stood by with his rifle in case the animal attacked. The Eskimos at Scoresby Sound are not allowed to shoot musk oxen except in self defence.

The animal appeared not to see us till we were about thirty yards away and then, suddenly lifting its head, it wheeled to face us. I filmed it feverishly while it glanced from one to the other of us with mingled fear and menace. At that time I did not know that musk oxen usually charge uphill: I was photographing it from above. All at once it stamped its feet, snorted, and charged straight at us with

## WE VISIT SCORESBY SOUND

quite amazing speed for so ungainly looking an animal. I ran one way and Neilsie the other, and I rather regretted having no rifle myself. However, the musk ox just charged straight on up the hill till it was several hundred yards away, when it turned and faced us with lowered head. Seeing that we were still where it had left us the animal galloped on again till it was out of sight in the next valley.

On our way back we passed a place where dandelions grew in profusion, and stopped to fill a bag with the leaves, which are a great Eskimo delicacy when eaten with blubber. Here too was a patch of the most heavenly blue *Gentiana nivalis*. A Snowy Owl flew over, screaming occasionally, looking rather like a large sea-gull till one saw its blunt head and broad wing tips.

Presently we saw another musk ox, rolling on a sandy hillock. As soon as it saw us it raced up a steep hill overlooking the inlet and watched us with its ugly massive head and down-curving horns just showing over the summit ridge. These animals seem to prefer racing up the steepest and roughest hills: to look at their ungainly bodies with low-hanging matted fur one would not believe they could go so fast.

As we recrossed Hurry Inlet, well satisfied and tired after our day's work, we met a contrary wind which raised a nasty chop on the water and made us take three hours over the return journey. Normally when kayaking one wears a wide seal-skin belt which fits over the manhole and comes up to one's chest, thus preventing water slopping into the kayak in a choppy sea. I had not been able to unpack mine and the waves continually splashed in, so that by the time we got back I was sitting in several inches of water. I learnt a lot about the hunting at Scoresby Sound from old Neilsie, who also beguiled the time by singing to me some of the old Eskimo songs, strangely moving dirges with a recurrent refrain quite unlike any type of European music.

At Cape Hope—which, incidentally, they pronounce

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

“Cabubi”—we cooked and ate the Guillemots I had shot. After a long day without food a meal such as this can be good beyond description. The natives, in a state of great excitement, told us they had seen two ships enter the Sound in the morning, a beautiful and an ugly one; so we got into our kayaks again and went back to Amdrup’s Havn eager to meet Dr. Charcot and his veteran ship the *Pourquoi Pas?*

The crimson disc of the sun had now disappeared behind the gaunt mountain tops. The high glacier snows, relinquishing their customary white colouring, had taken on more sombre twilight tones. Even the vesper wind had ceased to ripple the water, leaving a silence so solemn that we spoke only occasionally and then in whispers. The soft red and purple shadows of evening mingled with the blue-green reflections of the ice in the still water, while a bank of low fog blurred the outlines of the distant bergs and skirted the feet of the mountains on the other side of the fjord.

The French Polar Year Expedition had done things in style. As well as the *Pourquoi Pas?*, looking magnificent with her white hull and trim spars, they had the *Pollux*, an ice-breaker, built in 1914 to keep the Baltic open and since converted to a mine-layer. There were 120 men on the *Pollux* alone. She looked rather out of place in Scoresby Sound, belching forth volumes of black smoke. The Frenchmen had more than 300 tons of provisions, including 6 tons of wine. They also had a Ford car which they hoped to use for collecting fossils in Jameson Land. We could not help comparing their abundance with our meagre resources.

Watkins and Rymill had gone out in their kayaks to meet the *Pourquoi Pas?* as she came in, and the Frenchmen, taking Watkins in his seal-skin kayak coat for an Eskimo, made signs for him to roll his kayak, which he did with such skill that they still thought he was a native and were more than surprised when he hailed them in French.

## WE VISIT SCORESBY SOUND

That evening the French photographer and I spent several hours trying to repair my cinema cameras. A week or two before we left England Watkins had told me he wanted me to take a cinematograph film, and so I had learnt as much as I could about the "shooting" but had not had time to master the mechanical side. Already on the way out our two aged Bell Howell cameras had started to stick, and Watkins and I had spent several evenings pulling them to bits and trying to put them together again. We got them more or less in working order, in spite of having several parts left over.

One of the chief factors which made it possible to run an expedition at so low a cost was that Riley had brought his own motor boat, the *Stella Polaris*. She was 18 feet long with a beam of 6 feet, and was fitted with a 9 horse-power Thornycroft engine. At Scoresby Sound she had her first introduction to ice, when the day before we left we all went over to Cape Hope in the *Stella* to buy dogs. The Angmagssalik dogs are an undersized and miserable race, but up here we found a much better type; so Watkins bought a few as a backbone to the teams we would get later at Angmagssalik. Buying dogs is much the same as buying horses, you must keep all your wits about you and believe nothing you are told. One dog we liked the look of was, according to its owner, twelve years old and quite useless; but since its owner seemed so reluctant to sell it, and as the state of its teeth belied such senility, we were equally determined to buy it, and eventually took it away together with another rather wild white dog. The "twelve year old" turned out to be one of the best dogs we had, indeed he became the leader of Rymill's team. We took them down to the boat, running the gauntlet of surrounding teams. The dog teams belonging to different owners have definite territories, and if any other dog trespasses—especially if he is being led and is consequently helpless—they all come round and bite at any part they can get hold of. Watkins had persuaded the Governor of the colony to sell him two

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

remarkably fine black and white dogs, descendants of some brought originally from the west coast of Greenland where the dogs are much larger.<sup>1</sup>

On July 29th, still in glorious weather, we left Scoresby Sound for Angmagssalik. Captain Tving had promised to drop us at Lake Fjord itself on the way if the ice conditions allowed. This would be a tremendous help as it would save us weeks of ferry work getting all our gear up from Angmagssalik, and would enable us to do most of the local survey before the winter. On Cape Brewster, at the south of the Sound, thousands of sea-birds were nesting; Kittiwakes, Brunnich's and Black Guillemots, and great numbers of Little Auks; but as we left the coast the number of birds decreased, though in the evening I saw three Ivory Gulls settled on a floe, their snowy white plumage making the ice look dirty.

To begin with, the ice conditions were certainly as good as when we had entered the Sound. Running into ice just about Cape Dalton we deserted the shore water, and fearing lest the ship might be hemmed in and beset between the pack and the rocky coast, made for the open sea. The next day found us making southward nearly seventy miles out from land. A huge mountain range appeared, lying well inland from the head of Kangerdlugsuak, presumably the New Mountains which Watkins had discovered from the aeroplane on the 1930-31 expedition.

We kept a sharp look out for Ejnar Mikkelsen's schooner, the *Sokongen*, which we knew was now about here. He was running a summer expedition to investigate the barren Blossville coast between Kangerdlugsuak and Scoresby Sound, and especially the district round Kangerdlugsuak

<sup>1</sup> These two dogs were brought back to England at the conclusion of the Expedition and spent the winter of 1933-34 at the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park. They have now sailed with Rymill for the Antarctic as members of the British Graham Land Expedition.

## WE VISIT SCORESBY SOUND

itself, to see if it would be possible for the Eskimos to exist there if they were to spread northward from Angmagssalik. He was also putting up a few wooden huts to be used by the Eskimos as wintering places on the way.

If the ice allowed he intended to enter Lake Fjord and to erect a hut there. Mikkelsen had most kindly agreed to lend us this hut for the winter and to let us have a certain amount of food and coal if he had any left over from his own expedition. We were naturally rather perturbed when we heard that the *Søkongen* was held up just north of Kangerdlugsuak by a belt of old bay-ice which had not yet broken up.

On the last day of July, thick fog and heavy pack-ice made it quite impossible for Captain Tving to get into Lake Fjord, though he steamed west for some way till the ice became dangerous. He then turned south again for Angmagssalik, intending to get below the mass of ice which is always banked up north of Cape Dan.

About here we saw several Great Shearwaters: although it was July these birds were presumably "wintering" here, having nested far south at their breeding grounds on Tristan da Cunha in the South Pacific. Hundreds of Fulmar Petrels were crowding round the bleached and bloated bodies of two dead whales, including some of the bluish- and brown-coloured kinds that are found in the north. As we turned west again and neared Angmagssalik, Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes became more common.

We all felt very excited as we approached the settlement and recognised most of the men, who, in spite of rough and foggy weather, came out to meet us in their kayaks. It was wonderful to meet our old friends again and to hear all the news. Old Nicudemudgy was still alive, Arpika and Gertrud were engaged to be married, while Gustari was so grown up that we hardly knew him.

At Angmagssalik we spent most of our time having coffee with our old friends the Governor, the wireless operator and the missionary. One day Rymill and Riley went in the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

*Stella Polaris* over to our old Base to leave a depot there for Watkins to pick up when he should sledge south in the following spring on his way to cross the Ice Cap to Godhaab.

They found the old Base in a sadly derelict condition, smelling vilely of stale seal-blubber and dirt. It was most depressing to see no cheerful mechanic working in the hangar, which was otherwise just as we had left it. The wireless aerial and earth wires still led into the hut, but there was no busy wireless operator to welcome cold and tired travellers with hot rum-punch and boiled seal-meat as in the old days.

One evening the Captain allowed us to have many of the natives on the deck of the *Gertrud Rask* to show them the films we had taken on the last expedition, as well as some scenes of London and the R.A.F. display at Hendon. It was the first time that any of them had seen moving pictures, and their bewildered and voluble delight when they recognised each other and themselves fully repaid the trouble we had taken.

The Captain wirelessly to Denmark for permission to take us up to Lake Fjord on his way back, and that being granted we left Angmagssalik with the *cathechist* Karadi as pilot on August 8th. Next day we reached Lake Fjord.

*That such things should sometimes—very seldom—befall, in this greatest of sports (mountaineering), as well as in hunting and football and swimming and every great sport you can name, is nothing against it or them. The mere retention of life is never a big enough aim to absorb all its powers. And even here it may count for a little that death by a fall on a mountain, or by exposure on one, is as a rule death disarmed, for the dying, of many distresses—those that you know when you see men die, as the grimly ironical phrase is, “quietly in their beds.”*

C. E. MONTAGUE.



## CHAPTER III

### THE TRAGEDY

As we entered Lake Fjord, tranquil and lovely in the mellow sunshine of an August afternoon, we were full of expectation and joy. We could imagine what the first settlers in America must have felt as their ships passed silently up the rivers through that entrancing new country in which they were going to make their homes.

Lake Fjord, or Tugtulik as the natives call this district, was known to the Eskimos from ancient times. In 1884, Gustav Holm, the discoverer of Angmagssalik, though he did not penetrate so far north as Lake Fjord, was given the following information by the Eskimos about this fjord and Nigertusok, the one to the south which curves right round in a northerly direction so that the lake is equidistant from both fjords.

“ The Nigertusok fjord has received its name from the circumstance that the north-easterly wind, called *nigek* or *nerrajak*, blows very violently there. The violence of the wind may be so great that stones a cubic foot in size can be blown along the ground. The last people who lived there froze to death, because the whole roof of their house was carried away by a north-easterly gale.

“ The Tugtulik fjord has its name from reindeer, which are said to have been plentiful in those parts in former days. People indeed can tell that fresh excrements of those animals have been seen there. Within the fjord there is an inland lake in which there are salmon of such a size that they have to be caught by means of seal-hunting implements. It is told that they are just as large as sharks, and that a dog can satisfy his hunger on the stomach of a salmon. The narrator had, however, not seen them himself. It is told that in

## THE TRAGEDY

this district there is a bear-trap which was constructed by the legendary hero of the Angmagssalik, Kagsagsik."<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 1911 the Danish botanist Kreuse visited Lake Fjord, otherwise no European had been there before us.

Lake Fjord is a small Y-shaped fjord the extremities of which are only three or four miles from the open coast. A high conical island of rock, reminiscent of Ailsa Craig, after which we named it, guards the mouth of the fjord, which is rather more than a mile in width. The steep-sided north branch of the fjord terminates in a glacier wall nearly a hundred feet in height, running the whole width of the fjord. This glacier, longitudinally streaked with lines of moraine debris, is fed by many tributary glaciers winding round the feet of lesser mountain ranges visible in the background. On the north side of this fjord is a narrow hanging glacier of extreme steepness.

The southern branch of the fjord leads through less rugged mountains to a wide and fertile valley containing the lake. A swift winding river a mile or so in length flows from the lake, bringing down so much mud that ships must anchor long before they reach the end of the fjord.

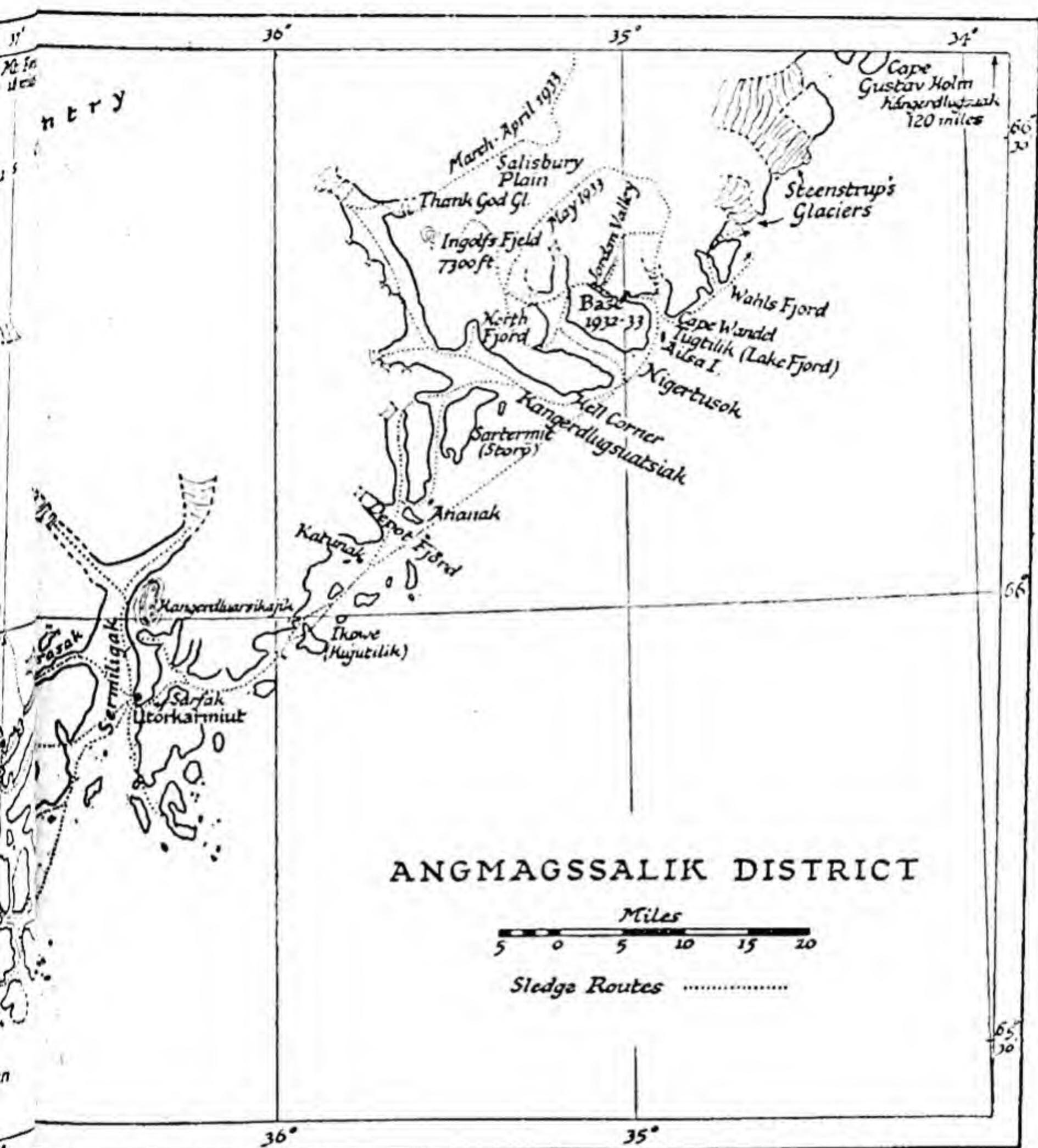
Owing to the kindness of Captain Tving in bringing us all the way to Lake Fjord, we were nearly three weeks ahead of our programme; and now, while Riley could attend to his meteorological station, and Watkins, hunting from his kayak, could start to lay in a store of seal-meat for the winter, Rymill and I were hoping to get most of the local

<sup>1</sup> *Meddelelser om Grønland*, vol. xxxix., page 111.

Note: No winds were experienced at Nigertusok throughout the year 1932-1933; indeed, being more protected, the north-easterly gales blow with less violence there than at Lake Fjord.

These gargantuan salmon seem to have vanished with the reindeer, nor were we successful in our search for Kagsagsik's bear-trap !





## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

survey done before the freezing up of the fjords and the winter snow put an end to summer travelling.

Watkins and I, who had spent several days at Lake Fjord with the *Quest* in 1930, went to a level place which we remembered near the head of the fjord, where, with the help of the ship's crew, we very soon got our supplies ashore. Quite inadequate, they looked, to support four hungry men for a year, but the memory of the many seals we had seen on our way into the fjord reassured us as we set to work to choose a site for the tent.

In case Ejnar Mikkelsen could not visit the fjord and erect the wooden hut we were to use in the winter, we had brought a large dome-shaped tent which we could live in till he arrived, and which could be built over with sods and stones in the Eskimo manner to give us serviceable—if somewhat cramped—quarters for the winter. This tent, which Watkins had designed, was of thick canvas, and was supported on six curved uprights of ash meeting in the centre round an adjustable ventilator. The tent had an opening like the mouth of a sack so that once it was tied up no wind or snow could enter. On each side of the entrance there were talc windows which fitted into snowproof canvas slots.

On August 10th, at dawn, the *Gertrud Rask* hooted a farewell to us and started on her way back to Denmark. I don't think one of us felt a single pang of regret as our last link with civilisation was snapped, and we were thrown on our own resources. It was like the beginning of a marvellous summer holiday: the ideal sort of existence one dreamed of in boyhood.

For the next few days we were exceptionally busy. John Rymill, who had served a useful apprenticeship for this sort of life on his father's station in Australia, was expert at all handy jobs: not only could he use firearms, tools, whips, and so on, but he could repair them when they went wrong; he could also do all sorts of strange things with a piece of

## THE TRAGEDY

rope, and was an expert carpenter. He set to work to erect a bench across the major portion of our tent to serve as a bed by night and a seat by day. Our private possessions could be kept below the bench, which was raised a couple of feet from the ground. As our only supply of wood was the packing-cases in which our gear had travelled, and a few planks of hard wood for sledge-runners, our furniture was necessarily scanty. Riley started to put up the Stevenson screen to hold his meteorological instruments, while Watkins, the Eskimo Karali, and I, built a low wall of stones and sods on the projecting flap of the tent to make it safe against gales. The dogs, four huskies and two Alsatians, were tethered on one side of the tent and a hole was dug in the bed of the stream for our water-supply on the other. Apart from pemmican for sledging-rations, our supply of food consisted of a few hundredweight of McDougall's self-raising flour and a box of Borwick's baking powder, several cases of margarine, a large consignment of Cadbury's milk chocolate, a sack of oats, a case of Lyons' tea, a few boxes of Nestlé's condensed milk and of Tate and Lyle's sugar, a case of Crosse & Blackwell's potted meats, some cases of Chivers' jams and tinned fruit, and several boxes of munch—a most delicious biscuit made from oats, sugar and butter; also several cases of Spratt's dog biscuits intended primarily for the dogs, but always a useful standby for ourselves. There was also a large box labelled "Not to be opened till Christmas Day," a present from Mr. and Mrs. S. L. Courtauld.

It was essential that we start to hunt at once as we needed to keep most of the food for the winter; so that same evening, August 10, Watkins went off seal hunting in his kayak, while I took my rod and tried for a salmon in the river, and Rymill and Riley started to unpack the fishing nets.

In summer when seals are plentiful the only way one can secure them is from the kayak. In the autumn and winter,

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

when they have plenty of blubber, they will float when shot, but in the summer when seals are thinner, and when there is a greater proportion of fresh water in the fjords, they will invariably sink. To capture seals in summer the Angmagsalik Eskimos usually stun or blind the seal with a shot-gun, and then harpoon it from the kayak while it is floundering about in the water. When the seal is shot with a rifle it will usually sink before the hunter can get near enough to use the harpoon. If the seal is playing on the surface of the water, or sleeping, a clever hunter, crouching down behind the white cotton screen on his kayak, can paddle near enough to harpoon the seal without the use of gun or rifle. Of course in the old days seals were habitually hunted from kayaks in this way.

The type of harpoon most used on the East Coast consists of a wooden shaft about six feet long ending in a square ivory head, to prevent the wood splitting, to which is attached by a seal-skin thong a thin conical ivory extension a foot or so in length. At the base of this extension a small projection fits into a socket in the head of the shaft, so that it is normally held rigid. The harpoon head, consisting of a sharp metal<sup>1</sup> blade about four inches long slotted into a barbed ivory base, fits over the end of the conical extension. A seal-skin thong sixteen yards or so in length runs from the detachable harpoon-head to the large seal-skin float which lies immediately behind the hunter. This harpoon-line lies neatly coiled in the kayak-stand—a wooden tray in front of the hunter.

The harpoon is thrown by means of a flat piece of wood about two feet in length which acts as a lever, or extension of

<sup>1</sup> Long before the Angmagssalik Eskimos were brought into touch with Europe—about 1890—they used to make hazardous umiak journeys to the Cape Farewell district to obtain metal and tobacco, in exchange for narwhal ivory, from their West Coast neighbours. These journeys sometimes extended over several years.

## THE TRAGEDY

the arm, but remains in the hand after the harpoon is thrown. When harpooning a seal one tries to manœuvre the kayak so that the seal is ten or fifteen feet from the hunter and well to the right of the kayak. The harpoon is then lifted from the kayak deck, where it lies with the throw-stick on top ready to be grasped. As the harpoon is raised to throw—in the same way as a ball is thrown—the point which, while on deck pointed to the back, now points at the quarry. As the harpoon flies through the air the line runs freely from the tray and the hunter makes a few rapid strokes with his paddle to move the kayak to the left to avoid being capsized by the fighting seal. As the barbed harpoon-head and a varying amount of the conical extension enter the seal the latter “breaks” from the shaft to lessen the strain on the harpoon, but is still attached by the seal-skin thong. When the seal dives or fights the shaft floats or is flung free so that the hunter can recover it. As the line continues to run out the hunter grasps one of the thongs which hold the float to the kayak and throws it far out to the side so that as the seal dives the kayak will not be overturned. Then, if the seal is dead, the float will prevent it from sinking, and if only wounded the float will check its escape and will direct the hunter to the path of its flight. A narwhal or big seal will keep the float submerged for as much as half an hour. Once the seal is attached to the float the hunter can then despatch it with the metal-headed lance which is kept on the kayak deck behind him. This lance, which is thrown with the harpoon’s throw-stick, is not barbed but “breaks” to take up shock in the same way as the harpoon. The seal-skin line holding the lance head is attached to the middle of the wooden shaft, so that when the wounded animal dives the drag on the shaft will pull out the lance head so that it can be recovered and thrown again and again till the animal is dead.

The Eskimos do not as a rule hunt alone in kayaks, not only because of the inherent danger of solitary hunting, but

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

because two or more hunters are usually more easily able to capture a seal. Once a seal has been killed, it is so much easier dealing with it if there are two kayaks, which can then come alongside facing each other, and with a paddle placed across the two decks make a rigid contrivance enabling the seal to be conveniently hauled up from the end of the line, the harpoon head extracted, the hunting gear rearranged and the seal prepared for towing home. The smaller seals can be lifted on to the deck behind the float, and thus, if the hunter can keep his balance, be fairly easily conveyed home: the natives always make a point of carrying two poles on the back of the kayak—either two lances or a lance and an ice-spear, so as to prevent the seal slipping off when carried in this way. But the larger seals must be towed, and even if several kayaks are harnessed to one carcass it is such a drag on these light craft that most strenuous paddling is needed to make them move at all. To overcome this difficulty the Eskimos cut a small hole at the base of the seal's neck and inserting a long curved bit of wood they work it about till there is a space between the blubber and the skin, then putting their lips to the hole they inflate it, finally blocking up the hole with a wooden peg. Once this has been done the seal floats high out of the water and can easily be towed home. Sometimes, especially if he is alone, the hunter finds it easier to get out of his kayak on to a suitable low floe and to prepare the seal from there. This is done not only to relieve cramped limbs, but also to rearrange hunting gear which is normally out of the hunter's reach. The screen, for instance, is sometimes knocked down when passing through heavy ice, and must be replaced before hunting can continue.

At certain seasons of the year, especially when the great migrations of the bladder-nosed seal are in progress, the Eskimos find it better to shoot the seals from the more stable ice-floes. This is usually out on the open coast where the greater saltiness of the water keeps the seal floating while the

## THE TRAGEDY

hunter, after shooting, gets into his kayak, which he has pulled out beside him on the ice, slides in it back into the water, and paddles as fast as he can to the seal.

It will be seen from this brief description that seal hunting from kayaks, although perhaps a little gruesome, is one of the most exciting sports in the world. It had always been imagined that Europeans would not be able to manage the Eskimo kayak, certainly not to the extent of being able to secure seals from them; but Gino Watkins, seeing the Eskimos doing this, thought it possible for us to learn too: and with his amazing versatility he soon became the best kayaker amongst us, learning to roll his kayak with his throw-stick and eventually with his hand alone. Not only was he skilful at this more spectacular side of kayaking but at the end of the last expedition when he, Courtauld and Lemon had gone from our Base to Julianehaab, a distance of about six hundred miles, in an eighteen foot whale-boat, he was able to provide for the party with the seals and birds he shot from his kayak. On this journey he had had to hunt alone; and to him, this element of danger, added to the responsibility of getting food for his party, made the journey the most enjoyable one he had ever undertaken.

Rymill and I had also learnt to roll our kayaks but had had little experience of hunting seals from them. We hoped that in the intervals of our own work, and later on in the autumn, we should have more time to hunt with Watkins, and thus by our combined efforts lay in a stock of seal-meat which would feed us and our dogs till the following spring. But at first, when Rymill and I were busy, it was inevitable that Watkins should hunt alone, and it must be admitted that he preferred hunting alone, confidently rejoicing in his own ability and independence.

The first day Watkins went out he returned empty-handed, saying that although there were plenty of seals, through lack of practice he had lost the art of judging where the seal would next come up after it had dived. However, next day

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

he returned with a fine fjord seal and a dozen Black Guillemots. As there was a nasty chop on the water he had not been able to remove the harpoon head or blow the seal up, so it had taken him several hours to tow it home from the branch fjord where he had killed it. Seals were plentiful here, especially at the foot of the glacier wall. The Eskimo Karali soon skinned it for us, leaving the blubber still attached to the skin to be stored up for lighting the tent in the winter should our paraffin supply prove insufficient.

Karali was one of the most intelligent Eskimos in the district. Descended from a line of *angakoks*—or witch doctors—he had early shown promise not only in telling the old folk-tales but also in illustrating them. He had, therefore, been chosen to be sent to the college at Godhaab, on the west coast of Greenland, to be trained as one of the *catechists* who are in charge of the outlying settlements of the Angmagssalik district, and are answerable to the Greenlandic missionary at Angmagssalik, who has received his training in Denmark. They must teach the children, take services on Sunday, mend any broken bones and generally keep the peace; in return for this they are provided with wooden houses, coal and enough credit at the shop to make them practically independent of hunting. In addition to this they are the only natives who may buy any alcohol. There are three *catechists* in this district: at Angmagssalik, Cape Dan and Kuamiut. Karali lived at Kuamiut, a flourishing settlement of twenty or so Eskimo houses some way up Angmagssalik Fjord. With his quick sense of humour, his knowledge of the folk-lore of the tribe, and his quiet intelligent ways he was always a great favourite with any Europeans, though his autocratic ways made him rather unpopular among the Eskimos, who are unused to any sort of discipline.

Karali, once a skilful kayak-hunter, had now given it up, having a year or two ago capsized and nearly drowned. He

## THE TRAGEDY

was, therefore, rather concerned to see Watkins hunting alone. Having piloted the *Gertrud Rask* into Lake Fjord, he was waiting with us for a few days until, having settled ourselves in, Riley and I should take him back to Kuamiut in the *Stella Polaris*. The plan was that on our return Rymill and I should then take the *Stella* down to Angmagsalik to buy dogs, while Riley did his meteorological work and Watkins, possibly with the help of one or two of the hunters who were coming up to winter in the next fjord, would continue hunting seals.

The same day that Watkins got his first seal, Rymill caught 80 salmon in the net which we set where the river flowed into the head of the fjord. These fish are actually a species of char, but as they looked and tasted exactly like salmon we always called them such. We had a trammel net which we set across a branch of the river and also a seining net which we used at high water. This net was fifty yards long, six feet deep at each end and twelve feet in the middle, where there was a pocket to enclose the fish. While some of us on shore held a rope attached to one end of the net, others rowed out in the dinghy to pay out the net which was ready in the stern, landing again fifty yards further up stream. Then both parties would quickly haul the net ashore. Being leaded and corked, the net, dragging over an even bottom, captured any fish we could surround.

A day from my diary, though it naturally emphasises my own work, gives an idea of the life we were leading at this time.

*August 11th.* Meant to start early to-day for a day's birding, but low fog, all silver in the morning sunlight, delayed me till 8. As the sleeping-bench slopes downhill we tend to roll off in the night, and it creaks ominously whenever John turns over. After munch and chocolate I set out with pistol (in case of bears) and .410 for specimens, also a tin for plants. I saw no salmon running up

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

the river and only one Glaucous Gull. Heard a Red-necked Phalarope as I started. (John, amused by my Red-breasted Mergansers and Long-tailed Skuas, has invented a bird called the Double-breasted Whalcatcher, which he sees often, but always when alone.) Our hut lies a few yards from the shore at the foot of a steep slope strewn with massive boulders from a perpendicular bluff above. From the top of this, our estate looks like a treeless garden of Eden. From the sandy head of Lake Fjord the river winds through a mile of delta terraces and low foothills to the lake. The lake itself, of a peculiar milky green colour, lies at the foot of steep scree slopes coming from mountains on the left; while on the right fertile lowlands border the banks of a stream flowing into the lake from a tributary valley surrounded by higher mountains and glaciers. Beyond the lake there is more flat country and then the ice-scattered head of Nigertusok, the fjord to the south of Lake Fjord which curves right round to the north. Beyond that again an almost vertical rock wall a couple of thousand feet high, and away in the distance the austere pinnacle of Mt. Ingolf, the highest mountain in the Angmagssalik district.

On the way up to the lake, parties of 20 or 30 Snow Buntings flew past me, all juveniles—the adults disappear at this time of year—a few Lapland Buntings and several family parties of Wheatears. I photographed the lake with lovely cirrus clouds forming above, and patches of glistening white cotton grass. No waders here but many droppings and feathers of geese. Saw an old Eskimo stone fox-trap on the hill-top. Not much ice in Nigertusok; saw four seals there and a Red-throated Diver. On the hill to the north of the lake I found *pyrola uniflora* growing and blue gentian, clumps of harebell, willow herb, hawkweed, alpine rue, lady's mantle, dryas, as well as five different kinds of saxifrage, and white arabis. Heard a Redpoll. The streams flow down the barren

## THE TRAGEDY

hill-sides making long oases of foliage among the barren scree slopes. Found dwarf azaleas and rhododendrons growing here and empetrum with masses of delicious berries as big as the end of one's little finger; these berries are just the same as those growing on the Yorkshire moors. Returned at 5.30 as fog blowing in again. Helped John to split salmon; we are drying them for dog food. Oiled my skis and ice-axe with a mixture of linseed oil and paraffin. Gino out hunting. Quintin trying to make the new paraffin-stove work: only frightful fumes exude at present, but Quintin has a way with refractory things and will probably win. Boiled salmon and fried seal liver for supper; we have no spoons or forks, only knives and fingers. Overate grossly, then we lay back and had half a slab of chocolate each. One soon ceases to miss vegetables and bread. After supper, pressed flowers and started to skin a Snow Bunting. John's Alsatians, Joe and Bill, are loose; they follow one about and are embarrassingly friendly. Quintin was shaking down the maximum thermometer when, at the bottom of the swing, it struck against something hard and broke in pieces—it was Bill's head, he had walked silently up behind! Thick fog and very cold. Gino returned with a seal. . . .

Next day Riley and I got up early and left with Karali for Kuamiut. It was a coldish day and foggy, though calm at sea. There was practically no ice outside, just a long oily swell. We soon lost sight of land and steered across the wide mouth of Kangerdlugsuatsiak by compass. The sun disappeared, and as we mistrusted the compass, we were rather concerned to meet some Little Auks, who are usually seen only far from land. We turned in a few points and soon found ourselves among the maze of islands to the south of Kangerdlugsuatsiak.

Even Karali hadn't an idea where we were, as only occasional rocky headlands and mountain tops appeared through or above the fog. At last we found a level beach with several

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

spars of driftwood, and as it was getting dark, stopped and put up our wall tent. We were on a small island only 200 feet high. There was an old grave on the hilltop and the remains of a winter-house—just an overgrown indication of where the house-wall ran, and a luxuriant growth near by indicating the midden where the refuse was thrown.

Near the grave I found the twisted head of a lance still in its bear-bone socket. This evoked a story from Karali—a true story—the man concerned, though now dead, was once a neighbour of his.

“A long time ago a young hunter was pursuing a bear across the uneven pack-ice in his dog sledge. At last he overtook the bear, which was a fairly small one, and hurled his lance at it. The bear in its struggle broke the lance, and reaching open water escaped with a portion of the lance head still in its flank. The young Eskimo kept the remains of the lance in his box and got himself a new one in exchange for his wife, of whom he was in any case tired, as she sewed badly and moreover had an inordinately large appetite. Years later when this hunter was an old man he saw one day a gigantic white bear standing on the top of an ice-floe. He shot it, and when he came to cut it up to put on his sledge his knife unexpectedly struck something hard. This turned out to be the remains of a lance head. When he got home he took the rusty portion of his broken lance from his box and putting the two together found that they exactly fitted.” “Did he then buy his wife back again?” I asked. “No,” replied Karali. “She had long since died of overeating.”

During the night several icebergs rolled over and at each crash Riley went out to see if the boat was all right. Next morning the fog was worse, though it cleared intermittently. We seemed to be surrounded by land. The isolated summit of a peak would loom over us as though floating in the mist. Suddenly, seeing a glacier, the only one about here, we discovered we were at an island called Katunah, and were able

## THE TRAGEDY

to continue our way south. Passing the settlement of Ser-miligak we were disappointed, as we were hungry, to find no Eskimos there. They had not yet moved into winter quarters, being still on the way home from Angmagssalik, where they had collected when the *Gertrud Rask* came in, to buy ammunition, tobacco, and provisions.

A few hours later we met a party of them camping by a famous fishing river in Ikerasak, spearing salmon and drying them on the rocks. They would grapple for them in the turbulent pools of the river with a device consisting of a few fish hooks tied to the end of a couple of harpoons lashed together. As soon as they heard our motor boat they put some fish on to boil over an open-air blubber fire, and we had a marvellous meal of delicious red salmon.

This turned out to be the camp of Enock, the great hunter, who was on his way north to winter at Nigertusok near Lake Fjord. There was also an umiak load of people who had come across from Cape Dan for a few days' fishing, and some young men who had kayaked over from a camp nearby, where they were hunting Greenland seals.

That evening we reached Kuamiut and saw a welcoming crowd of people on the shore in front of a number of seal-skin tents and earth houses dominated by a large wooden building which acted as church and school, with Karali's snug wooden house beside it. As soon as we landed, willing hands moored the boat and carried our gear up to the house while Johanna and Eliza, Karali's wife and daughter, made us welcome. Nothing could be more comfortable than this spotlessly clean little house, whose largest room was only eight feet by eleven. In the lavish Danish way coffee and cakes were soon followed by a more substantial meal of grilled Eider Duck, which in its turn led to more coffee and "schnapps" and then to bed in the attic where we slept on the floor in our sleeping bags.

Next morning we met Dr. Tinbergen, the Dutch biologist, and his wife, who were camping near by. On the *Gertrud*

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

Rask we had arranged that when I could get down to Kuamiut he and I should go up to the head of Kingorsuak fjord to study birds and plants. Remote from the blighting influence both of the Ice Cap and the drifting pack-ice, the extremities of Angmagssalik Fjord were supposed to be the most beautiful and fertile districts on this coast, and I had long intended to go there.

Karali wanted to come too, but the next day was Sunday, one of his busy days. However he got over that by taking the service at 5 A.M. and soon we were speeding up Kingorsuak in the *Stella*.

There was hardly any ice in this almost monotonously straight fjord, fully ten miles in length, with steep mountains rising on each side to two or three thousand feet. A few yards above the water, vivid green patches, indicating old house ruins, spoke of the great population there had been here in the old days when the Eskimos followed the amasset or caplin fishing. In June they would collect here from all parts and scoop thousands of these small fish on to the bank where they were dried and threaded on to lines for winter provisions.

With the first arrival of cod in 1923 the caplin ceased to visit Kingorsuak, so the Eskimos no longer went there; but now, though the cod have by no means left the district, caplin are increasing again.

On our way up the fjord we passed some low islands where hundreds of Arctic Terns breed. Further on we saw a Mallard, three Red-breasted Mergansers and a couple of Red-throated Divers. At the head of the fjord a line of about 50 Glaucous Gulls followed the receding tide where small salmon were leaping right out of the water.

The *Stella* departed when we had put our tents up, and Riley promised to return for us next day. Up here the willow bushes reached well above our knees and several plants, for instance the marsh cinquefoil, flourished here, though they would not grow near the coast. Walking

## THE TRAGEDY

along by the side of a lake we saw the tracks of many Arctic foxes, and a sandy bank where the cubs had played. When we got to the head of the lake, in the wide stream that drains the deep horse-shoe valley beyond, we saw swift moving arrowheads in the water where salmon were running up against the current. Being short of food we stunned them with small shot and dashed into the stream to hurl them out on to the bank before they should revive. This was a most exciting sport, as some of the fish were seven or eight pounds in weight. Unlike the salmon in the sea, these fish were of a vivid crimson colour, and very lovely. Karali tells us that there are two kinds of salmon: the silver ones which spend the summer in the sea and then in August and September run up to rivers to winter beneath the ice in the lake, leaving it in June as soon as the ice permits; and the red ones, which spend most of their lives in the lakes, coming down the rivers in the summer only as far as the sea, and running far up the streams at the head of the lake to spawn in August and September. Whether this is correct or not, at this time there certainly were pure silver fish running up from the sea to the lake and crimson fish going up the river beyond the lake. The whole question is rather complicated as each river and lake seems to have its own breed of salmon, varying in colour and weight and even taking different food.

On August 15th, after another long walk in which we saw rather disappointingly few birds, we were returning to camp to meet the *Stella* when we saw Riley and Karali coming to meet us. With them were two strangely European looking men in sea boots and blue jerseys. I could not imagine who they were, as there should have been no other white people on this coast at that time. When they spoke broad Scots the mystery was still more inexplicable.

Apparently the Aberdeen long-liner, *Lord Talbot*, fishing halibut and cod off the East Greenland coast, was suffering from boiler trouble, and seeing Angmagssalik marked on the map had decided to enter the harbour and repair her

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

boilers. Meeting an Eskimo in his kayak as he approached the coast, the skipper, Captain Watson, asked for Angmagssalik. Now although the main settlement with the store and wireless station is called Angmagssalik on the map, it is always known to the natives as Tasiusak, while the former name refers to Angmagssalik fjord where Kuamiut is. Thus it was that the Eskimo, who was on his way to winter at Kuamiut, induced the Captain to wait while he transferred to the *Lord Talbot* his umiak, his tent, his wife and family, his dogs and all the paraphernalia an Eskimo family takes with it on its way to winter quarters, and then directed Captain Watson, not to the main settlement, but up Angmagssalik fjord to Kuamiut where no ship had ever been before.

Having heard much about the desolate, forsaken character of this coast, Captain Watson was surprised when the trim *Stella* put out from behind a headland, flying the red ensign, with Quintin Riley at the wheel looking very smart in his yachting cap. Karali, representing Denmark, had put on his old pilot coat, which had at least one button from a Danish naval jacket, and with Riley interpreting he graciously made Captain Watson welcome to Kuamiut. Two of Watson's men, not content with having spent most of their lives catching fish, had accompanied Riley to the head of Kingorsuak to try and catch salmon while the engineers were drawing the fires and repairing the boilers.

On the way back to Kuamiut, meeting contrary winds, we got very cold, but kept our spirits up by singing Scots songs; however, we soon thawed out in the *Lord Talbot's* warm cabin. She was a very dirty long funnelled boat of about 280 tons. Being always in a hurry during the few days she remained in Aberdeen after some months' fishing, she never had time for a coat of paint. The *Lord Talbot* was equipped with a searchlight so as to be aware of ice when fishing in the Davis Strait, and a Marconi echo sounder, taking 60 soundings in 70 seconds, so that she

## THE TRAGEDY

could follow the path of the zigzag sloping banks on which the halibut feed like a flock of grazing sheep.

The Captain and two of the crew came ashore in the evening and we had a dance in Karali's house. The Eskimo girls there were surprisingly good dancers, having practised repeatedly in the winter evenings. That night when we went to bed we saw the silhouette of the *Lord Talbot*, and high above the fjord a brilliant full moon, with its vivid dancing path of reflection broken by the protruding black headland of Cape Dan.

Captain Watson is one of those rare men who take a genuine pleasure in going out of their way to help others. He gave the Dutchman a lift back to Angmagssalik and took letters home for us. And when we set off back to Lake Fjord we were presented with a bucket, some eggs, oranges, halibut and cod, and various things we were short of.

After breaking the journey at Katunah, we got back to Lake Fjord on August 17th, having sailed most of the way with a following wind. Such are the vagaries of tide and wind, that, although the open coast was devoid of ice except for occasional icebergs, we found Lake Fjord so packed with brash-ice and pack that we had to ascend the mast to discover a way through.

We found all well at our camp. Rymill, as well as having begun his map, had laid in a good supply of salmon, while Watkins had returned almost every day with a seal. We rather missed having no wireless, as we had no means of knowing where Mikkelsen was, and when he would visit us.

Here the events of the next few days are copies from my diary.

*August 18th.* Our water supply has dried up, which is a curse; but there is a glacier torrent quite near. Played gramophone till midnight: up at 7. Twice in the middle of the night John rushed out naked to chastise a dog that was howling—unfortunately it was the wrong dog, so had little effect. Fried eggs for breakfast. Twelve or so

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

Greenland Redpolls flew over the tent calling. Busy day. John went off up the valley with the plane table and range-finder. I skinned a Redpoll, then cut fish open and hung them over a wire to dry; you cut the head off, then split down the back from the head end. They are crammed full of shrimps and baby squids and most of them have tape-worm. Cleaned my guns. Seal for lunch: the big seal fried—rather searching for the teeth! John makes a kind of bread in the frying-pan. In afternoon did film work with Gino. A very hot windless day. Two natives arrived from Nigertusok today, Nikolay and Emmanuel, a grubby boy of 16. They say it is a three hours' walk coming along by the lake; apparently they reached Nigertusok a few days ago after rather a grim journey, and they have already shot 3 bearded seals and many small ones. We are changing over to "summer" time now, going to bed at 8 and getting up at 4. I think we ought to change our watches so that we rise at a less godless hour. We argued a long time about this; Gino can't see what difference it makes what the clock says! Fried seal for supper: did it in a sort of fritter. My knee is swollen: I ought to rest it.

*August 19th.* New time a bit irksome at present; luckily we didn't hear the alarm, so were not up till 5. It will be better for one man to get up first and cook, as we waste a lot of time. Good old porridge again: you can't beat it. The two natives slept in a musk ox skin on the floor. Heavenly day. John went off to survey. Tides very extreme just now; we have 300 yards of mud at low water. Went out with Gino and Quintin to take film of *Stella* coming through the ice. Got some good shots, though one camera sticks a bit. Boiled fish for lunch and supper. Made a bench to write on and a board to stop my bed from slipping off in the night. Went out with the seining net and both natives, who were very thrilled. We got none on the far side but twelve this side, the

## THE TRAGEDY

best 2 lbs. : it is most successful at  $\frac{3}{4}$  tide. All very silver, with green backs and many paler spots. Fins are pink in the centre and white-edged, they have a touch of pink on the sides too. The roe is undeveloped. Set trammel net anchored to two stones in the water. It is 25 yards long and 6 feet deep and has trammel on each side of the main net. We tried leaving the net right across the river at high tide to catch a big haul as it ebbed, but the force of the water pulled one end off the moorings.

Gino hunted all the afternoon but got nothing. He shot a seal very close but it sank. He says the other day he all but lost his kayak. He was out on a floe inflating a seal when the glacier calved and with the resulting wave the floe he was on hit the shore and broke in half. He just held on to the end of his kayak. I must skin birds tomorrow or they'll go bad. John's fat Alsatian just can't reach his neighbour and they bark at each other all day. Quintin rearranged the dumps, a good job; Gino never worries about that sort of thing: life's too short.

*August 20th.* Up at 5—at least Quintin was, and cooked porridge. I was going to kayak with Gino for film, but it was a dull morning so I went with John to help with the boat while he surveyed the fjord; I wanted to look at birds round about. We left at 8; Gino went off kayaking about the same time. John and I went to the right hand point at the bend of the fjord; I used the range finder for him and skinned birds in my spare time. Several young Iceland Gulls flew past and a few old ones. We did more mapping from the point between the two branches of the fjord, then at 2.45 we started to cross the branch with the glacier. At 2.55 I saw a kayak bladder apparently floating, and soon realised it was a complete kayak, without occupant, drifting about. We passed the paddle 150 yards from it. The gloves were pushed in under the fixed seal-skin line on the deck, the gun was missing, the harpoon loaded up but held in position by a strap of

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

ivory beads. We hauled the kayak on board and emptied out most of the water. No sign of Gino. We climbed the mast and looked all round: we stopped the engine and shouted: we cruised up and down—still not a sign. Then we went right across the glacier face from end to end thinking he might have swum ashore or collapsed on an ice-floe. There, in front of almost the centre of the glacier, 150–200 yards out in the middle of a flat irregular floe about 10 feet by 6 we saw his trousers and kayak belt, soaking wet. There was a hollow two inches deep where they had thawed the ice: they must have been there for hours. We tried to recall if we had heard the thunder of ice falling off the glacier and both remembered that at about 11 o'clock we had heard a crash and had been surprised to see no iceberg collapse or any sign of the accompanying wave. It may have been a lump falling off the glacier, but there was no newly calved berg about—all the big ones having thaw marks from the warmer surface water. But there was quite a lot of brash in one place, and even if a large lump falls off it looks small when eight-ninths are below water.

We searched all round for an hour and shouted everywhere. We also searched the hills on each side with glasses. He is wearing his shirt and white anorak, but no boots as he can't get into his kayak with them on.

We decided to go back in case he had already walked home. The accident may have happened several hours ago.

We cannot quite work out how the disaster came about. Perhaps he had his rifle out to shoot something and shot too much to one side, or an iceberg collapsed nearby, or he wounded a bladder-nosed seal which subsequently attacked him. All these might capsize the kayak. Then in the excitement he lost his paddle and tried to come up with his throw-stick, for that was not on the harpoon and I know it was very stiff. No. I don't think he was

## THE TRAGEDY

knocked over, as the bladder and hunting-line were not sufficiently displaced.

He may have got out on to a bit of ice to relieve cramp in his legs, to shoot a seal, or to arrange something on his kayak, and then the floe upset of itself or a lump of ice fell off the glacier. This may have carried his kayak off and he may have swum after it, then returned to the floe, for the clothes on the ice were soaked. More probably he was tipped into the water together with the kayak, and then fearing cramp returned to the floe instead of first recovering his kayak. Then, seeing his kayak drifting off, he must have undressed and swum after it and tried to get into it, for unless he had done this the kayak would not have been full of water. But he knew we were about and that we would visit the fjord, so may have waited an hour or two in the hope that we would find him, then when too late tried to reach his kayak.

Quintin says Gino feels cold water very much even in England and soon gets cramp. Here the water is below freezing. We searched the fjord on both sides for an hour to make sure that if he was about we would pick him up while there was still a chance of his being revived. Then we returned to the Base at 4.30, thinking he may have walked home over the hills—three miles or more of fearful going and no boots too. Only yesterday Quintin and I agreed that any day we expected him not to come home. It is too risky this hunting alone; only a few days ago he said a lump fell off the glacier and nearly carried his kayak away. Yet we could not believe that we should never see him again. I felt sure he was dead at this stage but could not grasp it—only a sense of unutterable waste. Gino always dwelt apart somehow, and underneath was as cold and unemotional as ice: none of us ever fathomed the full and intricate depth of his character. Only yesterday he said “a man can get anything in this world that he wants, absolutely any-

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

thing." I admire him and feel perfectly happy with him, and I would follow him anywhere.

We met Quintin and Enock coming from the river in the dinghy. They must have realised the truth as soon as they saw the kayak. Enock and a whole crowd had walked over while the other two natives had returned to Nigertusok. We had a hasty meal and picked up blankets, a sleeping bag, clothes, medical supplies and a thermos.

We quartered the fjord, and searched both shores right out to Cape Wandel. We dropped John at the far side of the glacier, and he walked three quarters of the way over in case Gino had tried to walk home from there. At 7.20 John and I set off with ropes and ice-axe to walk home. We crossed the glacier—it was prickly ice and not much crevassed. We definitely realised he was dead and decided that we must carry on just as before. Gino would have liked us to take no notice, but just to behave as if nothing had happened. Gino had his shortcomings but he was a very great man. He had complete control over his mind and had the character of a man much older than 25. It is young to leave the world but he has had a lot out of it. He would have hated to die in a bed. I suppose we must go to Tasiusak at once and wire the news home. Oh, why did this happen?

We walked home up the hill and found it very rough going. I got too far up and tried to find a high level route but it was no good, so I had an excuse to go on up to the top of a peak as I love to do. I had to return down a steep scree slope with hard snow down which I couldn't have stopped had I fallen. It was a heavenly night, with the ageless pinnacle of Ingolf silhouetted against the bright yellow and orange of the fading sunset, with hard purple clouds above. A half-moon rose higher and higher over the sea, and the stars were almost dimmed by the shaking curtain of aurora, at first a nebulous radiance but gradually changing to clear-cut ribbons of light

## THE TRAGEDY

quivering and waving like seaweed fixed to a rock in a strong tide. I saw Auriga and Lyra, the Pleiades and Cygnus, all going round the Pole Star just as if nothing had happened—and Gino is dead in the fjord. How shall we carry on without his inspiration? I can't grasp the fullness of the tragedy—he might have done so much, and he is dead.



It was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath. It seemed to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion and a rush of great waters, as if an immense dam had been blown up to windward. In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it were—without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him.

JOSEPH CONRAD



## CHAPTER IV

### PERILOUS SEAS

AFTER Watkins' death we continued our search for another day though reason told us there could be no possible hope. Nevertheless I think we all felt secretly that Gino could not really be dead. We carried on just as if nothing had happened, mentioning his name quite naturally in conversation, and I think we all kept glancing furtively at the hillsides towards the fjord mouth expecting against the laws of possibility to see Gino's slim figure suddenly appear, quietly apologising for the trouble he had caused us and the untidiness of his appearance.

Rymill took over the leadership of the expedition. Not only was he the oldest and the most experienced, he was the chief surveyor, and most of our work was mapping.

It was agreed that on the following day we should all go to Angmagssalik to wireless our sad news to the world, and to await the reply of our American employers to our request to continue our original programme, except for the crossing to Godhaab which, with our reduced numbers, would no longer be practicable. We took in the fishing-nets and made everything ship-shape in case of a gale in our absence. All our stores, personal possessions, and equipment were put under a tarpaulin weighted heavily with stones.

We left a note for Captain Mikkelsen in case he should reach Lake Fjord while we were still absent, and then, early on the morning of August 22nd, we left for Angmagssalik.

We towed the whale-boat behind the *Stella* with the six dogs which we would have to leave with Enock in the next fjord. Rymill and I took our kayaks with us so that we could practice at Angmagssalik, as we would probably be there for some time awaiting replies from America.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

It took us two hours to reach the settlement where Enock's party of eleven souls were living in a rather battered seal-skin tent, pitched on a rocky promontory running out into one of the most lovely fjords we had ever seen. The carcasses of bearded, Greenland and fjord seals on the rocks beside the tent gave evidence of successful hunting. After helping to chain our dogs up and giving Enock some cigarettes in exchange for a supply of fresh seal-meat we hurried on.

Outside the fjord we met a short steep swell which threw the bows of the whale-boat high into the air. When there was not much ice about we towed the whale-boat twenty or thirty yards behind, but in thick ice we kept her up close.

There were many birds about at this time. As we left the Base, parties of fifty or sixty Snow Buntings flew past, while a Red-throated Diver made a noise like hounds in full cry. Iceland and Glaucous Gulls flew in and out of the fjord; Kittiwakes, young and old, kept to the outer coasts where innumerable Black Guillemots dived or collected in frightened parties. Out in the open sea Little Auks were numerous, looking even smaller than they were in comparison with occasional Brunnich's Guillemots. Once we saw a very dark Falcon perched on the top of an iceberg about eighty feet above the water. At this time of the year these birds can catch as many Little Auks and Guillemots as they want. As we approached Sermiligak in the twilight, the sky gradually paled to a curiously cold luminous blue in vivid contrast to the darkening silhouette of the high jagged-topped mountains flanking the fjord. The shadow-furrowed wake of our small boats spread behind us, rudely breaking up the perfect reflection of a typical Greenland sky with a regular mesh of thin mackerel clouds radiating from a single point, and scattered wisps of mare's tail cirrus pencilled with almost unnatural definition.

Sermiligak settlement has an atmosphere of its own, still retaining something of that grim and not very distant past

## PERILOUS SEAS

when, in times of famine, survivors feasted on the flesh of their dead companions, when murders were of common occurrence and the people were kept in a state of terrorised obedience by the *angakoks*, whose strange seances are still spoken of with awe.

In the old days the Angmagssalik Eskimos roamed from Mikki's Fjord and Kangerdlugsuak in the north, almost down to Cape Farewell, a distance of at least a thousand miles. But since the shop was started at Angmagssalik most of the hunters prefer to settle fairly near so that they can visit the shop by kayak or umiak in summer and by dog-sledge in winter. Only the more enterprising hunters still occasionally return for a year or two at a time to the more remote areas to hunt bear or narwhal.

Sermiligak is further from the flesh-pots of Angmagssalik than any other of the permanently inhabited wintering places, and so the Eskimos there are less dependent on the shop, being frequently cut off from it from August till June or even July.

Yelmar and Narda, two elderly brothers, who were still exceptionally fine hunters, came out to welcome us and helped us to moor the boats across the creek beside the settlement. Maji, a peculiarly Indian-looking man, came down from his tent further up the hill. These three fine old hunters have always wintered at Sermiligak except for occasional years spent further afield. As we landed we told Narda our heavy news. The men took it quietly enough. They were very fond of Watkins and were amazed to find such powers of leadership and initiative in so young a man; but they are so accustomed to sudden death, especially in kayak accidents, that they accepted our news with an air of stunned fatality. The women, however, were more demonstrative.

As an umiak load of people were away in the outer islands hunting Greenland seals, there was plenty of room for us in the tents; but we preferred to keep apart in our own tent, as

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

we could not face the prospect of listening to the Eskimos discussing the circumstances of Watkins' death.

Next day, being entrusted with all sorts of commissions—to buy and exchange skins for cloth, rice, beads, and, above all, tobacco, we set off for Kuamiut, our next stopping-place. We got there by midday and from afar saw a huge crowd waiting for us on the beach. Karali, as was proper to his dignity, waited till the boat was almost in, then, followed by his wife and daughter, walked down from his trim little house.

At Kuamiut everything is well organised. We were not allowed to moor our own boat or carry anything up to Karali's house. All this was efficiently done by the young men.

Karali, who had been with us all at Lake Fjord only a few days before, was quite overcome to hear of Watkins' death and blamed himself for letting him hunt alone in his kayak. Karali always felt that as we were guests in his country it was up to him and the other natives to see that no harm befell us.

In Karali's house we found Peter Rosing the Pastor, and Miss Roos the Danish nurse. Rowed by a crew of young Eskimos, they were doing a round of the outlying settlements to give the nurse some idea of her scattered practice and the conditions in which the people lived.

After a hurried meal of boiled salmon we left for Angmagssalik as the weather looked threatening, and we had a stretch of notoriously stormy water to navigate on the open coast between the mouth of Angmagssalik Fjord and the entrance to Tasiusak harbour. At this time there was exceptionally little ice about to blanket the movement coming in from the open sea. So far we had followed the channels behind the islands, but even there we had noticed the swell breaking on the outer headlands.

Soon after leaving Kuamiut we met thick fog and a gusty wind. This was a most depressing journey. The inaction of running the boat through the still fjords, and the fantastic

## PERILOUS SEAS

beauty of the scenery gave too much opportunity for thought; while at each settlement the renewed sorrow of the natives fanned our own regret with increasing poignancy.

We tried to keep to the middle of the fjord, but soon lost sight of land and had to steer by compass. A steep short chop, due probably to the tide and wind meeting, lashed the face of the man at the wheel with painful and blinding regularity. The *Stella* bucketed fearfully though we went dead slow. The compass, upset by the chop or some local attraction went all over the place. We knew this because the sun still loomed through now and then, and we could check up on him. When I took over I started going north by compass, with the sun showing dimly on my right. I kept the sun in the same place, but the compass needle pointed to north-west and eventually round to south-east!

Luckily the sun was still visible as we rounded the corner at the eastern end of Angmagssalik island, but it soon vanished and we had to steer blindly, crossing invisible bays whose formidable headlands and skerries suddenly appeared amid a turmoil of white breakers. It was very rough out here and we were amazed how well the *Stella* stood it. After four hours of rather tense work we recognised the rock at the mouth of Tasiusak harbour and were soon in less troubled water.

Once again we had to break our news to the huge crowd that came down to the shore. All the flags were immediately flown at half-mast. The Governor put his attic at our disposal and we sat down to boiled eggs and the usual variety of small dishes followed by coffee and cigars. We went up the hill and sent a long despatch to *The Times* and messages to the Royal Geographical Society, Stefansson (who dealt with us on behalf of Pan-American Airways), and Mikkelsen.

Rymill soon heard from Stefansson that we might carry on as before except for the crossing to Godhaab, but we had to spend several days in the settlement awaiting other messages.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

We always found Angmagssalik settlement a most demoralising place as there is little else to do except eat and sleep, and drink interminable cups of excellent but exceedingly strong coffee.

I spent about three hours a day rolling my kayak with a young Eskimo who was equally keen. I was rather disappointed because I was still unable to roll the kayak with the throw-stick. However, I learned two new ways of rolling with the paddle.

One day we set off in the *Stella* to visit our old Base across the other side of Sermilik Fjord, to collect the provisions and dog food we had left there earlier in the month for Watkins' crossing to Godhaab, and some cans of petrol remaining from the 1930-31 Expedition. We intended to take this depot back with us to Lake Fjord.

We left Angmagssalik in heavy rain and very rough weather. With a following gale we soon reached Ikatek, the big settlement at the mouth of Sermilik, and decided to run in there. Unless the wind dropped it would be impossible to return with a full load, and if we could not do that there was no point in going on.

We met many old friends there. The natives were just moving into winter-houses. At Ikatek they favour a more modern type of house with a wooden front containing a real door, and glass windows, the remaining walls being made of stone and sod. These houses hold only one family and must be colder in winter than the traditional type of stone and sod house with a tunnel entrance.

There were quite a number of birds here in spite of stormy weather. Ikatek is probably one of the setting-off places for migrants returning to Europe. There were parties of Snow Buntings, Lapland Buntings and Meadow Pipits near the settlement, and several Ringed Plover, Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone down by the shore. A Great Northern Diver and a young Greater Black-backed Gull flew past as we arrived, and, just as we were going, we saw a dense party

## PERILOUS SEAS

of about fifty Red-necked Phalaropes chattering and swimming in the rough water by the shore.

Deciding that it was unwise to proceed we returned to Angmagssalik, shipping a considerable amount of water as we beat our way back against a lashing head wind and turbulent seas.

We got back to the settlement to find a message from Mikkelsen saying that he was now at Kangerdlugsuak and would reach Lake Fjord in three days' time, when he would want our help to erect the house.

We were rather apprehensive of the journey back as the weather had been very stormy lately and fresh snow already powdered the hills down to the thousand foot line. The first corner round into Angmagssalik Fjord and the crossing of Kangerdlugsuatsiak at the end of the journey were the two stretches we feared. In both of these places there is no protection from the open sea. We left the whale-boat at Angmagssalik intending to return for it and more dogs when the weather should improve.

I quote the return journey from my diary:

*August 29th.* Rushed round packing and saying farewells. Stilling Berg (the wireless operator) gave us a lump of venison and a parcel labelled "Use no hooks, don't open till Christmas Day." He is kindness itself. Not away till 3.0 P.M. Low clouds, but sea not too bad: we could see the coast now and then, and often the tops of the hills rising like islands from the clouds. Vast seas break and swirl over the skerries. Rain all day. I wish I were fonder of the sea. Few Little Auks out here and great flocks of Glaucous Gulls and Kittiwakes. We ran a lantern up the mast as we approached Kuamiut and were relieved to see an answering light more or less where we expected it to be. The pastor and nurse are still here as it is too rough for them to move on. The nurse told us that some time ago she put some sticking plaster over a scratch a young man had on his face. A fortnight later

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

she again saw the man. He was so proud of the decorative plaster that he had left it on although all sign of the injury had gone! They are getting plenty of cod here but no seals as yet. At Angmagssalik they are terribly short of food and there is little prospect of their being able to lay in any store for the winter. Spent a hilarious evening discussing our earlier blunders in our efforts to learn Eskimo. It is good to laugh again. Slept in the loft.

*August 30th.* Up at 5.0. Away at 7.0. Lot of Arctic Terns about, young and old; saw them driving Ravens and Gulls away from the nesting islands. Choppy sea, wind, very heavy rain. When the bows of the boat fling spray into one's face all the time it is almost impossible to see black ice which is rolling about in the sea, usually mostly submerged. It was fun steering, but it was dull and rather frightening sitting in the stern gradually getting soaked with rain and spray. We draped the sail over the two kayaks on deck and made a sort of crude shelter.

They have almost finished a big winter-house which will hold Narda and his ten children, many of whom are married and have families of their own. Yelmar lives in a wooden house. Being perhaps the greatest hunter in the district and having no children he can afford a luxurious establishment. Old Maji lives in another stone and sod house across the creek. We delivered all the things we had bought for them while Narda boiled up some seal-meat on his Primus—a new acquisition of which he was tremendously proud. Left at 12.30 and met a terrific wind round the corner of the fjord. Icebergs were rocking about and turning over like brash-ice, while white spray lashed our faces. In one place the waves blew bodily up the smooth inclined side of a fifty foot berg and were scattered from the top in a continuous wavering stream like a fireman's hose. The little Black Guillemots manœuvred head to wind making hardly any headway, like ducks over a stormy Scottish loch.

## PERILOUS SEAS

Suddenly in the lee of a battered-looking iceberg with vivid blue steaks in it seven or eight Greenland seals in a close pack raised their black snake-like heads and grey-green bodies high in the air. They looked round full of curiosity, then all dived together with a great splash, as if electrified.

I was steering, and when we rounded the second corner it was quite terrific. Threatening clouds lowered all round us and unearthly emerald and opal lights glinted in the angry water. The waves now came right over the bows and we could no longer make any headway. Quintin told me to turn, which I did somehow and started to run back to Sermiligak. Suddenly the Greenland seals appeared again, only fifty yards away this time, and facing the waves which broke round their long snaky necks, making them look more like sea-lions than ever.

As the natives prophesied still more wind, we moved to Yelmar's house and prepared to spend the night. This house has a wood lining stained a deep mahogany with tobacco juice, and smoke from the seal-blubber lamps. The sleeping bench has wooden partitions and there are very superior wooden benches and tables. A crowd gathered round in the evening. They just stand and gaze and gaze as if afraid of missing anything. Yelmar, perhaps the greatest hunter on the coast, is a grand old man, but his idiomatic talk is a little difficult to understand. He told us of all the bears which had gone to the purchasing of the wood for his house. On his own fingers and toes and those of his wife and friends he counted up to some prodigious total—about sixty-five I think it was, and twenty narwhals. They all know the country round our Base, having spent several winters at Kangerdlugsuatsiak to the south and Nualik to the north. They are all coming to visit us in March, if the sea ice allows.

*August 31st.* Narda came in at 3.0 A.M. to say it was a good day. Leaped out of bed and cooked porridge.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

Still a bit of wind about. The sunlight is just catching the high snows of the great mountains to the west— incredibly white against a dark sky. They all helped to pack and load the boat. They are a fine lot here. A bit inclined to cadge—but can one blame them? I think it's wonderful that they never steal anything.

We soon met trouble. A big wind meeting the tide caused such a chop that we put the nose under each time. Terrific rain again now. John and Quintin are wearing oilskins and I am wearing my kayak coat, trousers, gloves and boots, all of seal-skin. This keeps out every drop of water, only my face gets wet. Reached the island of Katunah by 8 o'clock and saw a Brent Goose there. There is an increasing head wind and a long heavy swell, but we must at least have a look at Kangerdlugsuatsiak as Mikkelsen is due to reach Lake Fjord to-day and we must see him.

We kept in behind the islands, intending to run behind Sartermie, then to cross Kangerdlugsuatsiak fairly far up and edge round the one remaining headland till we were in the shelter of Ailsa. Even here there were huge oily waves coming at us from all directions in the most embarrassing way. We were lost to sight in the troughs of the waves, but it was rather fun poising giddily on the crest and then sweeping down with that thrilling switchback feeling inside one.

We passed an old winter-house behind Ananah island with the wooden props for the umiak-stand still there. It was fairly sheltered in here and we cruised round shooting a few Black Guillemots for supper in case we did not get home. The motor has been spitting a lot lately, so we took the carburettor to pieces, none too easy with everything going up and down. An old bearded seal watched us for half a minute with only his head out of water, then went under with a splash, showing his body and flippers as he arched over. At last we got to the back of

## PERILOUS SEAS

Sartermie and landed in the pouring rain to stretch our legs and have a drink of water before making the final dash. There are many old graves by the shore, and a place where children have made a model winter-house, embellishing it with brightly coloured stone and mussel shells. Waterfalls come down every valley and the earth is sodden like wet moss. Finally we decided to try the last lap. It took little more than an hour to cross Kangerdlugsuatsiak with a roaring wind blowing straight out of the fjord. The waves got larger as we approached the fjord mouth, where there were ten or fifteen very large icebergs. We decided to make a dash for it, thinking there would be shelter beyond them. Out to sea I watched waves breaking on a berg which must have been over a hundred feet in height. This iceberg had a projecting step level with the water, and the waves breaking on this were thrown vertically into the air in a cascade of white spray, higher than the top of the berg. This was happening at intervals of about ten seconds: I watched it, fascinated.

Quintin was steering his boat now, with white set face, whirling the wheel round trying to keep bows on to the waves—and what waves—coming off the bergs at all angles. Soon the seas got worse. The usual vivid green of the water was varied by warning patches of indigo and white breakers. A following wind made the waves break ominously, and rushed us furiously on towards the point. On one side of us, only three hundred yards away, the breakers were dashing against a vertical rock wall, 1,000 feet high; on the other, the huge icebergs were rocking about like mere pack-ice and every now and then lumps would fall off them with a thunderous noise, though almost inaudible above the hideous din of the water. The waves, which must have been twenty feet high, were being hurled back from the sides of the bergs, making a filthy maelstrom of a sea. We dared not turn back and

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

face the waves as they were running so fast that they almost broke over the stern. At this point we realised we were playing for our lives. The nose of the *Stella* pointed into a steep green wall of sea almost dead above us. "Cut the kayaks loose!" shouted Quintin. I was working frantically at the bilge pump. Heavy petrol drums and ration boxes were hurtling about the boat. With an aching heart I saw my lovely kayak, covered with ivory I had bought from a dozen different hunters, go away astern, standing almost vertically on the waves. Then the other kayak went, but not before we shipped a really big sea and the water was more than a foot deep in the bottom of the boat. This made her roll more than ever and she was dipping her gunwales under. All at once I realised that the wind was now blowing from the other direction. The wind coming out of the fjord was a local gale, but here we met the full force of the usual north-easter sweeping down the coast. That was why the icebergs were held there, by the opposing winds. Again we shipped a sea and the *Stella* started to settle down in the water, refusing to rise on the waves. Then the worst happened, the flywheel of the engine was now under water and threw so much of it up into the engine that it coughed once or twice, spluttered and then stopped.

John, who really wakes up and comes into his own on such occasions, tore up the floor boards and started bailing furiously. Suddenly the pump stopped working. This was the last straw. As I set to work to prime the pump, I saw Quintin turn the boat somehow between two waves and with the northerly wind we started drifting helplessly towards a rocking berg with waves churning all round it. John, using a bucket, had bailed most of the water out by now, so put the sail up. As we got near the floe a gust of wind from the other direction suddenly caught us and blew us back towards another floe.

All the time we were being thrown about in all direc-

## PERILOUS SEAS

tions—now right up on a hill overlooking the icebergs with white spray dashing a hundred feet up them, now sinking into vertiginous hollows from which we never expected to rise. With Quintin's masterly handling of the sail in alternating winds, we gradually drew away from first one berg then the other. John gave the engine a turn and to our surprise it started straight away. I suppose the heat of the engine had evaporated the water from the plugs. John went on bailing and caught his sleeve in one of the nuts of the revolving propeller shaft. His arm was pulled into the bilge, but luckily the sleeve tore off and he was not badly hurt.

Curiously enough the sun shone all the time the crisis was at its worst, although we had not seen it for more than a week. As we drew away from Hell Corner, as we call this spot, into the relatively calm water of Kangerdlug-suatsiak, a lurid yellow light descended on the land like something palpable. I looked at my watch, it was only 3 o'clock; and then I remembered that the Dutchmen had said there would be an eclipse of the sun on the last day of the month. I had quite forgotten it was to-day—a strangely symbolic ending to our encounter.

Quintin curled up in the bottom of the boat and immediately fell asleep. John and I amused ourselves by comparing our emotions. Neither of us has had much experience with boats so it was probably a case of "ignorance is bliss," though we derived little assurance from Quintin's set jaw and white face. Personally as long as I was working the pump I was quite happy, almost detached, like a spectator: but once the pump failed it was like the sudden breaking of a spell and I felt we simply hadn't a hope—but the realisation didn't worry me in the least.

It started to rain again as we recrossed the fjord making for an anchorage in behind Sartermie. We had plenty to do clearing up the boat. The tool box had spilt into the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

bilge and the compass box was smashed. My cases of photographic apparatus were full of water. We found a camping place, and in sheets of rain got our gear ashore. We spent more than an hour tying the boat across a creek with precipitous sides. Just as we were all in the tent with our wet clothes off, we heard the *Stella* bumping on the bottom and had to rush out in the pouring rain and tighten the moorings. The swell was so great even here that it was unsafe to leave the boat and we would have to keep anchor-watch through the night. After a grand supper of boiled Guillemot and Ptarmigan, I went out to do the first two hour spell.

By now the clouds had gone and the stars were of an unusual brightness. Watching them, and one of the best auroras I have ever seen, my turn was all too quickly over. I came on again at 3.30, when it was getting light, and the red glow of the sun dispersed the callow morning mists. All the clouds were crimson too: so much loveliness seems wasted here with so few people to enjoy it.

*September 1st.* We had a lot of trouble in the night with ice-floes drifting against the *Stella* and pushing her further up the creek so that she bumped on the rocks. We must wait here till the swell goes down, we haven't enough petrol for many more attempts. . . .

At midday we went out to have a look round, but as the swell seemed no less we decided to give it another day and to cross over to North Fjord, a more sheltered fjord on the opposite side of Kangerdlugsuatsiak. We would be on the Lake Fjord side of Kangerdlugsuatsiak at any rate, and if anything happened to the boat we could always walk over the hills and round the head of Nigertusok to Lake Fjord.

There was a shelving beach here, so we grounded the boat and at low water repaired one of the copper plates which was lifting on the bows, and a plank or two which had stove in against the ice.

Next day the swell had not decreased and it was not till September 3rd that we felt it safe to try again. There was still a very heavy swell off Hell Corner, but as there was no wind we got past without incident. We were very much afraid that Captain Mikkelsen would have gone on to Angmagssalik by now, so were much relieved to see the tall masts and crow's nest of the *Sokongen*, as we entered Lake Fjord. She had only got there the night before, having been held up by bad weather further north.

There were three Englishmen with his party: Lawrence Wager, the geologist of Watkins' 1930-31 Expedition; his brother, a botanist, and Michael Spender, the surveyor. They had had a very successful trip so far, as owing to the exceptional ice year they had no difficulty in reaching many previously inaccessible places. They found no Eskimo house ruins north of Mikki's Fjord, though there were a great many there, thus lending weight to the theory that the Eskimos had originally reached Scoresby Sound from the north rather than from the south.

In Kangerdlugsuak they found a great many bears—one of which had tried to climb on board, several packs of Greenland seals containing more than fifty in each, and three Norwegians who were going to spend the winter there.

Mikkelsen's men were putting up the frame of our house. As this was the sixth they had erected they could do it very fast, four men taking four days to put up a hut complete with windows and windproof roof and wall felting.

As Captain Mikkelsen was in a great hurry to reach Angmagssalik he could only spare his men to put up the framework and one end of our house. He had to go the following morning. Our plan was that while Rymill stayed alone at Lake Fjord building the house and doing Meteorological work, Riley and I should return to Angmagssalik in the *Stella* and bring up the whale-boat and the dogs we had chosen, together with various other supplies we needed for the winter. We hoped that if he could haul the *Stella* up

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

on board the *Sokongen*, Mikkelsen would give us a lift to Angmagssalik, but unfortunately his tackle was not strong enough. Captain Mikkelsen very kindly gave us some coal and supplies which he had left over, and allowed us to buy some of the provisions that Danish ships in Greenland always carry in case they are unexpectedly frozen in for the winter. We had brought very little food with us, expecting to rely largely on the hunting, but now that our chief hunter was dead it would interfere seriously with the scientific work of the expedition if Rymill and I had to spend the rest of the autumn laying in a store of meat for the winter; and of course if the hunting failed we should be very short of food. We were, therefore, exceedingly grateful to Captain Mikkelsen for his assistance. He also gave us each a bottle of "schnapps" for our birthdays. Although we had brought no alcohol with us we had now been given enough to celebrate birthdays and the return of sledging journeys.

At 3.30 next morning the *Sokongen* and the *Stella* left Lake Fjord together. As we would take the inner route behind the islands, while Mikkelsen would keep to the open sea and go round Cape Dan, we hoped to race him to Angmagssalik; but unfortunately when we got near Hell Corner the sea was so high that we were forced to run into Nigertusok for shelter. There was fog out to sea and over the hills, while a strong north-easter raised a following sea which threatened to break over the stern.

We thought we might as well go round and see Enock while we were there. We reached his tent soon after 5 A.M. to see his family crowding out to meet us in various stages of undress. There were eleven of them. Enock, the head of the family is about the finest Eskimo we have ever met. At Cape Dan, where he usually spent the winter, he had the reputation of being the finest hunter, that is—as an old Eskimo once told me—the man who goes out hunting most. His wife Weedymera (their pronunciation of Wilhelmina) was a most charming person. They had no children.

## PERILOUS SEAS

Kidarsi (Claus actually), Weedymera's young brother, was only twenty at this time, but having been brought up by Enock, he was a very fine hunter indeed, especially from a kayak. He had a morose, idle and generally unsatisfactory wife of nineteen and a baby daughter whose name we were quite unable to pronounce. Leah, Enock's aunt, was an elderly widow of fifty, with an uncontrollable scullery laugh and busy tongue. She had two meek daughters, Iduna and Orchina, thirteen and ten years of age. Nikolay, a rather gawkish youth of nineteen, but a promising hunter, had lived with his elder brother Enock for a number of years. There were also two orphans, or more correctly children whose surviving parent had married again. These two, Emmanuely and Iuanna, were round about sixteen years old, and in exchange for their work they were treated practically as equals by the rest.

They soon prepared a meal for us of delicious tenderly boiled baby seal and potatoes, followed by tea and sugar. We soon found that Enock's household did themselves pretty well even though they were further from the shop than any other East Coast Eskimos. The hunting had been exceptionally good. On the previous day Kidarsi had killed three fjord seals with his harpoon alone, without the use of a rifle, and Enock two fjord seals and a bearded seal. Our dogs were all in good condition and glad to see us.

Enock decided to come to Angmagssalik too. It took him five minutes to pack up his best seal-skin anorak and trousers, and we were soon on the sea again. As the wind was still blowing as hard as ever at the fjord mouth we ran back to Lake Fjord and worked on the house for the rest of that and all the next day, finishing the roof and the outer walls.

We were impatient to be off as the winter was getting near. Already we had had a sprinkling of snow even at sea level, and by eight o'clock it was too dark to work on the house.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

On the evening of September 6th we set off again, this time without Enock, who had changed his mind; and although the north-easter was blowing as hard as ever outside, we just got past Hell Corner. This was more by luck than skill. At one time, as it looked worse ahead, we turned the boat to see how she would face it. As we made no headway and started to ship water, we had no choice but to turn and run before the gale, feeling extremely thankful when we at last reached the calmer water of Kangerdlugsuatsiak. As it was quite dark by the time we had crossed the fjord, we anchored, and rigging up a shelter with the sail and tent, slept very comfortably in the *Stella*. We were awakened occasionally by floes hitting the boat, but they always drifted past.

At Sermiligak we found Narda very sorry for himself with a poisoned finger, and as it looked rather serious we insisted on taking him along to Angmagssalik.

We slept at Kuamiut and next morning reached Angmagssalik rather to the surprise of the Eskimos, who, hearing that we had left Lake Fjord at the same time as the *Sokongen*, firmly believed us to be drowned.

TOAD (stands and spreads himself):

*The world has held great heroes,  
As history books have showed ;  
But never a name to go down to fame  
Compared with that of Toad.*

*The animals sat in the ark and cried,  
Their tears in torrents flowed ;  
Who was it said, "There's land ahead" ?  
Encouraging Mr. Toad.*

(in an ecstasy) " *Oh, how clever I am ;  
How clever, how very clever*—(he breaks off)  
*Oh, misery ! Oh, despair !*

TOAD OF TOAD HALL

## CHAPTER V

### THE FLYING FAMILY COME TO GRIEF

WHEN we reached Angmagssalik we were much relieved to find that Mikkelsen was still there, busily engaged in trying to persuade some of the Eskimos to visit Kangerdlugsuak. The day before we arrived all the hunters had assembled in the church while Mikkelsen, with the pastor as interpreter, told them of the great hunting possibilities of Kangerdlugsuak, and about the rest houses, supplied with food and tobacco, which he had erected there and on the way. The natives are in any case anxious to go there, but they are reluctant to do the journey in umiaks as the active glaciers between Lake Fjord and Kangerdlugsuak push out ice with such force that the boat skins get torn.

The lack of a shop there, to supply them with ammunition and tobacco, is also a strong point against the journey. In 1928, eight umiaks, containing a hundred and nineteen souls, set off for Kangerdlugsuak, but they started too late in the season and got no further than Nualik; and in the spring, when they tried to complete their journey by sledge, the ice broke up before they got there.

Nevertheless by the time the *Sokongen* was ready to leave, most of the hunters had decided to go to Kangerdlugsuak, especially if Mikkelsen were able to provide a ship to take them past the dreaded glaciers. One man actually refused to let us have two dogs he had promised us in August, as he said he would now need them for bear hunting at Kangerdlugsuak!

When we came to take up our usual quarters in the loft of the Governor's house, we were told that they were reserved for "The Flying Family." Apparently an American, one Hutchinson, with his wife and two small daughters and

## THE FLYING FAMILY COME TO GRIEF

a crew of four, were flying from America to Europe along the northern route. We could not discover why they were doing this. They were expected the first fine day as they had already reached Julianehaab, six hundred miles to the south. We heard that they had been fined 1,000 kroner for landing at Disko, on the West Coast, without permission from Denmark; otherwise no one at Angmagssalik knew much about them.

On September 10th, Riley and I went in the *Stella* to our old Base to get the depot that had been left there in August for Watkins' crossing to Godhaab. We got there in six hours in spite of a heavy swell. Dark rain clouds swept across the mouth of Sermilik, but as usual we saw the sun shining on the hills and on the Ice Cap at the head of the fjord. There was no one about at the old Base; this was disappointing as we had hoped to find our old crowd of Eskimos here. There were only three mangy dogs, none of which we recognised.

It was raining hard again as we sat down to boiled seagull in the room where, two years before, we had spent what both of us agreed must surely be the happiest year of our lives. We had left the Base Fjord in 1931, never expecting to return, and now, here were we two back again, having supper as before, but the food had lost its savour. Gino was dead, Lemon was slowly dying in England, the rest of our cheerful crowd had unwillingly returned to the conventional whirl of civilised life. Gordon Bottomley's lines came into my mind:

But many deaths have place in men  
Before they come to die;  
Joys must be used and spent, and then  
Abandoned and passed by.

Earth is not ours; no cherished space  
Can hold us from life's flow,  
That bears us thither and thence by ways  
We knew not we should go.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

I looked round the hut. Even the Eskimos, feeling the spell, had left things exactly as they were. A yellow stained notice signed "Martin Lindsay" informed the world that he had lost a white dog-skin mit—the finder would be suitably rewarded. In the dark-room a bottle, filled with a strangely curdled liquid, was labelled "This solution is half strength and must be replaced." My bunk still bore the inscription "Hic jacebat 1930-31, F. S. C." hardly legible beneath a veneer of tobacco juice and blubber smoke.

The barn is old not strange.

The *Stella* was aground next morning and after taking on board a quarter of a ton of dog pemmican and provisions it was eleven o'clock before we got away. We saw our old friend Micardi kayaking out in the fjord, recognising him from afar by his peculiar style. He told us that the others were camping at Netuik, the settlement at the mouth of the fjord, and that they were going to move into the old Base for the winter. Once more we had the awful task of breaking the news of Watkins' death, in this case a thousand times worse since this family had lived with us during most of the last Expedition and loved Watkins as their own kin.

When they heard the news one woman had a fit, another burst into violent hysterics, and even old Poterdina wrung her hands, breaking into a tremulous, falsetto panegyric of Gino's various attributes.

Soon after midday we saw the black smoke of a steamer a few miles out to sea. We thought it was probably the *Lord Talbot*, as we had had messages of sympathy from them and a telegram from Captain Watson saying that he was in the neighbourhood and had letters for us. As we watched the ship she suddenly turned south, having previously been drifting slowly northward, and made off at great speed.

After some difficulty with high seas and a rising wind we reached Angmagssalik at about four o'clock to find the whole settlement seething with excitement. In the morning

## THE FLYING FAMILY COME TO GRIEF

Mr. Stilling Berg had sent off the usual weather report to Hutchinson at Julianehaab showing that it was an unsuitable day for flying and concluding with the words ". . . and now it is starting to snow." He then heard that the Flying Family had taken off and would reach Angmagssalik about midday. He continued to send weather reports. Suddenly at 12.05 he heard that they were in difficulties and were making a forced landing. From then till 1.15 he kept on picking up the S.O.S. giving their position, fainter and fainter, till at last it faded out altogether. The *Lord Talbot* picked up the message too and, keeping in wireless communication with Angmagssalik, rushed to the rescue.

The position given showed the Flying Family to have made a forced landing somewhere between our old Base and Isortok, the settlement further south. We knew this country pretty well. It was a maze of low islands and narrow fjords, usually full of ice—not a pleasant place for a large flying boat to alight. The *Lord Talbot* happened to have a searchlight for her work in Davis Strait: she was the only Scotch fishing boat so equipped. She intended to use this while searching after dark, as she had seen no sign of them by nightfall.

We got everything ready to set off in the *Stella* the moment it was light enough. We took with us an Eskimo, Neilsie, who had spent many years at Isortok and knew the devious channels. There was always the chance, if Hutchinson's position was correct, that the Isortok natives had heard or seen his machine come down and had hurried to the rescue with an umiak. But we knew the visibility had been pretty bad at the time, for at the moment of the forced landing we had been only ten miles north of his wireless position on our way back from the old Base, and even there a few flakes of snow had fallen, while it looked still worse to the south.

The Governor helped us to get everything ready overnight, giving us blankets, food, petrol and even " schnapps." We were in the harbour mouth by four o'clock. It was a

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

wonderful dawn: across the other side of the bay over Cape Dan a lurid red glow lit up the steep islands, topped with masses of heavy cumulus cloud. The icebergs were all rose-coloured and the sea around them an oily purple. It was a still morning, so we could keep well out to sea away from the coastal backwash. When we were opposite the mouth of Sermilik Fjord we saw the *Lord Talbot* further out to sea moving in the opposite direction; actually they were trying to get in touch with us, but at the time we thought they were returning to Angmagssalik with the survivors on board. This rather spoilt our subsequent search as we felt all the time that the fate of the Flying Family was known, and that they were either drowned or comfortably drinking coffee at Angmagssalik. However, we decided to go on and search as carefully as possible.

At midday we reached the Isortok settlement. At first it seemed deserted, but we soon found a couple of tents in a little dell. This year only about a dozen Eskimos were wintering here, but when we used to sledge over in 1931 from the old Base there were about seventy. None of them had seen anything of the lost airmen, but one very reliable woman said that on the day before, about midday, when she was picking berries on the other side of the fjord, she thought she heard an aeroplane and remarked on it to her companions, who had laughingly said that it must be the Englishmen back again. As the hunters had been well scattered on the day of the crash and still had heard nothing of the aeroplane, and as we, a little further north of Isortok, had heard nothing, it rather looked as if the forced landing had happened further south. We had visited the position given in the S.O.S. on our way to Isortok and had seen nothing there, so after a hasty meal we set off in the *Stella* to search the islands to the south and west of Isortok as far as the big Fjord Ikerasak, which the natives told us was very full of ice just now.

We found no sign of the Flying Family either in the

MARIDA AND NANA: TWO MARRIED WOMEN FROM ANGMASSMIK





## THE FLYING FAMILY COME TO GRIEF

main fjord inside, or out among the islands. At last, just as it was getting dark, we climbed to the summit of one of the outermost islands and had a good look round with field-glasses. We little thought, as we looked at the low hills on the other side of Ikerasak, that the Flying Family were at that moment waiting on the rocks by the shore, dreading the prospect of another shelterless night.

Far out to sea we saw three ships all sailing south. We later discovered these were the *Lord Talbot*, *Mount Ard* and *Star Victory*, searching the sea for any sign of the missing aeroplane.

We slept on the sleeping bench in the tent and early on the following morning left for Angmagssalik. We had some difficulty crossing Sermilik Fjord as there was considerable wind and a very high sea. The two natives who had taken the opportunity of a lift to Angmagssalik were thoroughly frightened and wished they were in their kayaks. When we reached Ikatek it was unsafe to proceed further, so we spent the night there hoping that the *Lord Talbot* would not leave Angmagssalik before we returned. Our two passengers left us here, having had quite enough of the *Stella Polaris*, and set off to walk to Angmagssalik over the mountains.

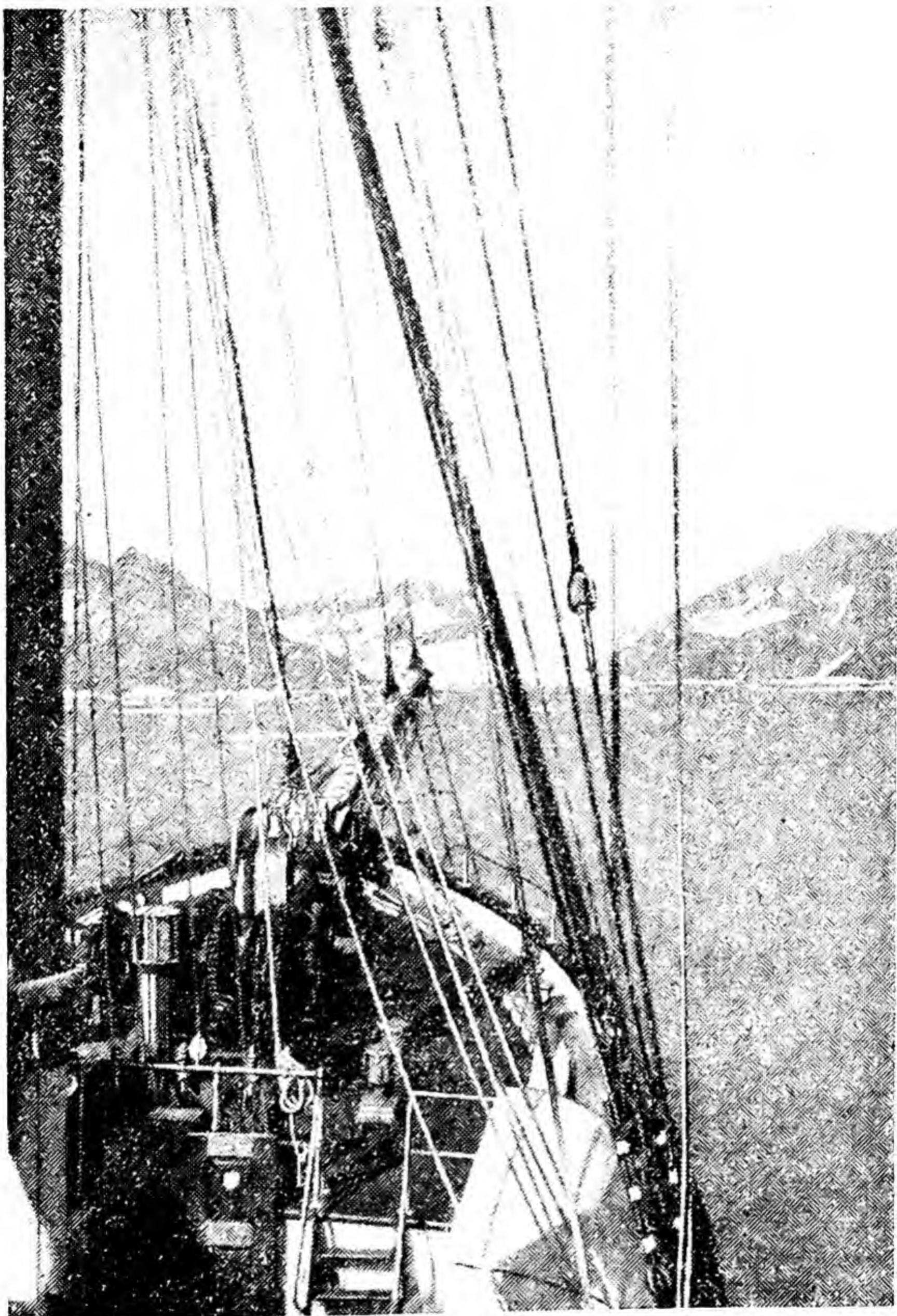
Next morning, when we got outside, the seas were simply enormous. We found it wiser to go almost a mile out from the coast to avoid the islands and skerries which broke up the seas so that it was almost impossible to control the boat. This frightened me since, being a landsman, I am always happier within swimming distance of the shore, and really on this trip back to Angmagssalik I expected the ship to founder at any moment. The waves were as big as they had been at Hell Corner, but on this occasion there was fortunately little wind. There was an iceberg about fifty feet high off the entrance to the harbour, and as we approached it a wave breaking against it suddenly shot high into the air, at least another fifty feet higher than the top

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

of the berg, poised for a fraction of a second, and then fell in a shower of spray.

We saw the *Lord Talbot* as we approached the settlement and, hailing her as we went alongside, were relieved to hear that all the Americans were safely on board, though the flying boat, a most luxurious Sikorski, had sunk. It was grand to see Captain Watson and his cheery Scots sailors again, and to get an unexpected mail from home. When the *Lord Talbot* left Kaumiut in August we had sent letters home by her, and the Captain, finding that he would be visiting East Greenland again, had actually taken the trouble to copy the addresses of our letters and to write to our various relations saying that if they cared to send a mail, he would try to get it through to us.

We then met Hutchinson, the father of the Flying Family; a short, clean-shaven man of about thirty-five years of age with a middle-west whine which much amused the Eskimos. He had come over by Hopedale, in Labrador, where, incidentally, he had heard a lot about Watkins and had been astonished to hear of his extreme youth. He then flew through rather bad fog to Godhaab, whence he intended to fly straight across the Ice Cap to Angmagssalik. The Danes, however, after Von Gronou's experiences, made him take the southern route by Julianehaab. There he had been held up for several days by bad weather. At last, in spite of the report of snow at Angmagssalik, he took off at 8.30 A.M. starting by way of Lindenow's Fjord. He was flying at a steady 120 miles per hour and all was going well till suddenly at 11.30, flying at 5,000 feet, he met a bad squall. At that time he imagined he was 75 miles from Angmagssalik. He flew blindly for twenty minutes and then came down to 4,000 feet to try and get below the squall. His wireless was not working properly and he did not receive messages saying that there was bad weather at Angmagssalik. He was, therefore, expecting to run out of the bad weather at any moment. As the squall remained impenetrable he came



THE "GERTRUD RASK" ENTERING LAKE FJORD



## THE FLYING FAMILY COME TO GRIEF

down to 3,000 feet, and then still lower, hoping to get below the driving snow. At last he found he was only just clearing the icebergs. As he swooped low over a rocky island, a flock of geese suddenly got up, one of which hit his wing, making a considerable dent. For a bird to do this, he said, was a very bad omen. He dare not rise again, as he was afraid of running into the high mountains surrounding Angmagssalik, so he decided to risk a landing and to wait for better weather. By great good fortune he landed among the ice-floes without damaging his machine. He then started to taxi towards Angmagssalik which he imagined to be quite near. For a time all went well, then suddenly he heard the water hissing below him in the hull and realised that, unless he got to land very soon his machine would sink. He turned back towards the west and made for the nearest land, reaching the desolate rocky shore to the west of Ikerasak in a sinking condition; and as soon as his wife and two small daughters, aged eight and six, his navigator, mechanic, photographer and wireless operator had been got ashore, his machine sank. They had managed to save enough wireless gear to receive, but they were unable to transmit. It was a great relief to them to hear that several fishing boats and the *Stella Polaris* were hurrying to the rescue, but it was tantalising to have no way of directing the rescuers to the spot, which was some distance from the position they had transmitted when they first sent out the S.O.S.

They built a rude shelter of rocks and earth and roofed this with a strip of the fabric of the wing, the tip of which was just uncovered at high water. They were then in a sorry condition with no boat of any sort, no adequate shelter, little food and quite unsuitable clothes. They built their shelter five hundred feet up the hill-side, so that they would be fairly conspicuous to a search party, but the sight of ice-floes packed closely on to the coast gave them little consolation.

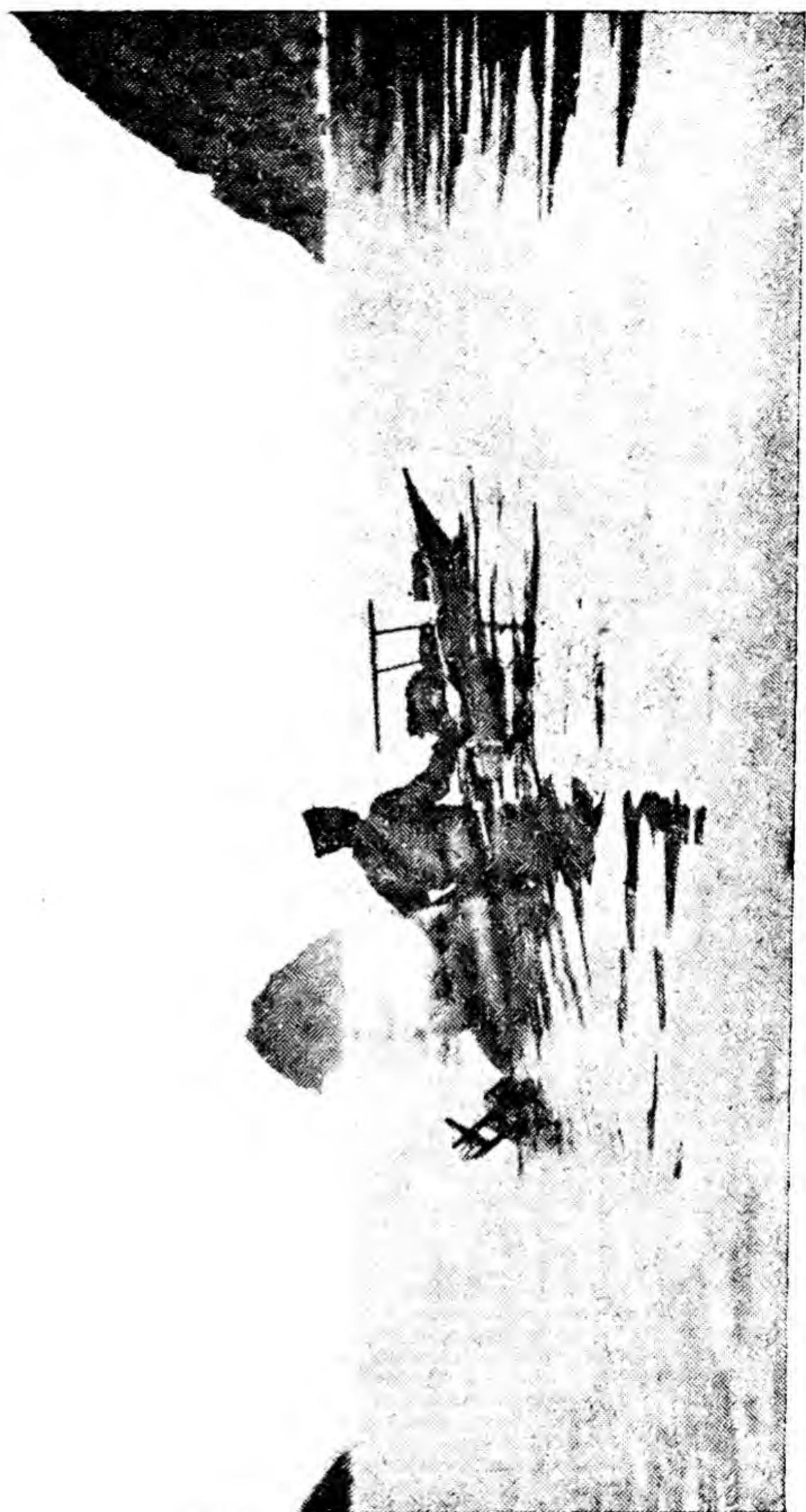
They reached the shore about 2.0 P.M. and the rest of the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

evening was spent putting up the shelter. They had food for five days, including the carcase of a lamb, a present from the wireless operator at Julianehaab to the Governor of Angmagssalik. There seemed to be nothing to shoot on land and no fish in the water. That night one of the crew thought he saw a light out to sea, but as it did not appear again they decided that it must have been the reflection of the stars on an iceberg. However, they lit a flare and burnt some film. They were very cold at night as they lay huddled together in their shelter with only an oil lamp for warmth.

All the next day they saw nothing except the fishing boats far out to sea. At dusk, just as Riley and I, having given up the search, were returning to the Eskimo tent little more than ten miles to the east, they saw a light quite near; then it flashed again showing it to be indeed a ship. The marooned party hastily lit their last flare, a red one, which was easily seen by Captain Watson and answered with a flash of his searchlight. Hutchinson then divided the last of his film into two parts and lit them one after another. They would not have to spend another despairing night in their frozen shelter.

We must return for a moment to the *Lord Talbot*. On the morning after the crash, Captain Watson, hearing from Stilling Berg that we were joining in the search, returned to Angmagssalik intending to pick us up at the harbour mouth, so that the *Lord Talbot* and the *Stella* could combine to search among the ice-filled fjords. It was then that Riley and I had seen his ship apparently hurrying back to Angmagssalik. Captain Watson then got in communication with the *Mount Ard* and the *Star Victory*, two other Scots fishing boats, and the three of them, at seven mile intervals, first took a line some distance out to sea from Angmagssalik to the mouth of Ikerasak, after which they were going to take another beat nearer the coast. At dusk, just as they were turning, they saw a red flare and, thinking that Hutchinson had either perished in the sea or was further



KAYAK WITH A FULL LOAD



## THE FLYING FAMILY COME TO GRIEF

north where his S.O.S. gave him to be, Captain Watson and his crew thought that the red flare was sent up by Riley and me to warn them not to come in any closer because of the ice. However they wirelessed the message: "If you are Hutchinson light two fires," and although he did not receive the message, by the most fortunate coincidence Hutchinson did actually light two fires.

The *Lord Talbot* was separated from this notoriously dangerous, illcharted coast by about twenty miles of rather close pack-ice, interspersed with many icebergs from the active glaciers at the head of Ikerasak. Being a steel ship she was of course quite unsuitable for working in ice, besides which it was getting dark. However, as they had no idea of the condition of the marooned party, they decided to push through at once. The searchlight was rigged on the mast-head and they started crashing through the ice sometimes at a speed of 11 knots. At last, at 10.30, after three hours of desperate work they reached the shore with no more damage than a few dents. As there was too great a swell to embark the party in the dark, they hove to and waited for daylight. Next morning the party were taken on board, though the machine had to be abandoned. After fighting their way out through the ice again, they reached Angmagssalik at three o'clock.

In spite of the loss of his flying boat, I think that Hutchinson was a very lucky man and owes his life to Captain Watson and his intrepid crew. The Flying Family seemed little cast down by their late experiences, though the younger girl had a bad cold. Mrs. Hutchinson's rouge, which she had managed to save from the crash, created almost as great a stir among the Eskimos as did her smartly cut jodhpurs.

There was a supper party at the Pastor's house that evening. With the Scots fishermen, the Flying Family, the Dutch scientists, the Danish nurse, Eskimos and Englishmen, we were indeed a mixed though convivial party.

It was rather a disappointment to us to find that the *Daily*

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

*Herald* had chartered the *Lord Talbot* to take the Flying Family back to Scotland, as we had hoped that Captain Watson would be able to give us a lift back to Lake Fjord on his way to the fishing grounds.

Soon yet another ship was to enter Angmagssalik harbour. The Danish naval ship *Maagen*, used for protecting the fishing on the west coast of Greenland, was at Julianehaab on her way home to Copenhagen when she picked up Hutchinson's S.O.S. and hurried to the rescue, thinking that if necessary she could take the Flying Family back to Europe. As she was the first Danish naval ship to enter the harbour this was a great occasion.

Commander Reis asked us all to a luncheon party on the *Maagen*, a serviceable little wooden ship of about fifty tons. After a typically Danish luncheon, so large that Riley and I were able to tackle little more than a quarter, we were talking to Commander Reis, telling him the circumstances of Watkins' death. "How are you getting back to Lake Fjord," he asked. "In the *Stella*," we answered, "towing the whale-boat filled with the dogs we have bought." "But how far is it?" "About a hundred and twenty miles." Commander Reis thought for a moment. He had seen the *Stella Polaris*; he had also seen the state of the sea outside the fjord mouth. "I'll take you up to Lake Fjord in the *Maagen*," he said.

This was an absolute godsend, as the seas were very high at this time owing to the stormy weather and the phenomenal lack of ice, and we were dreading our return to Lake Fjord with the *Stella* fully loaded and the whale-boat in tow. Once more, we were to thank the kindly hospitable Danes for going out of their way to help us.

On the morning of September 16th, we were on board the *Maagen* by 3.30. An early start was necessary as we hoped to reach Lake Fjord the same day and the *Maagen* was no speed-boat. It was very rough on the way up and we realised that had we been relying on our small boat the journey might have taken us several weeks, as we should



KAYAKMAN WITH HUNTING EQUIPMENT



## THE FLYING FAMILY COME TO GRIEF

have been forced to wait for fine weather before attempting to cross Kangerdlugsuatsiak.

We reached Ailsa at nine o'clock. It was a bright moonlight night with scudding clouds. The *Maagen* entered Lake Fjord cautiously with a man at the bows to keep a look out for ice, which was hard to see in spite of the moonlight. It was after ten o'clock when we reached the anchorage, guided by Rymill's hurricane lamp.

We had left Lake Fjord ten days before. About an hour after the *Stella* had gone out of sight round the corner of the fjord, a sudden violent gale of wind shook the Base hut. Rymill reckoned that we would be just short of Hell Corner about that time, and if we got away with it he expected us back fairly soon. He was so certain that we could not get round Hell Corner that he actually waited supper for an hour or two. When it grew dark and there was still no sign of our return, Rymill felt quite calmly certain that we were drowned. The prospect of facing the winter with only his two Alsatians for company did not perturb him in the least, as John Rymill is one of those self-contained people who prefer their own company to that of anybody else. When he came to putting up the sleeping benches in the hut he at first decided only to build his own, but eventually he thought he ought to erect ours too in case we turned up after all.

During these ten days Rymill had kept up the meteorological observations and had finished building the hut and most of the furniture. He had caught plenty of salmon at the river mouth up to September 13th, but after that he took no more; presumably they had by then all gone up to the Lake.

The circumstances of our return gave Rymill rather a shock. He had been sitting alone in the hut one night after his evening meal, wondering at what stage he ought to discontinue the meteorological observations and come out in the small boat to search for any sign of us, when he thought he heard the sound of a motor of some sort. He

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

went outside and in the still moonlight saw the silhouette of a ship. He naturally took this to be Mikkelsen's ship returning, especially as the engine made exactly the same noise. He thought that, as the *Sokongen* and the *Stella* had left for Angmagssalik at the same time, and as we had not arrived, Mikkelsen, after waiting for more than a week, had returned to Lake Fjord to see what had happened to us. It was therefore with great relief that John heard my hail from the bows of the *Maagen* and, coming on board, soon heard with even greater surprise the strange things that had happened to Riley and me since we were last together at the Base.

When Commander Reis and Lieutenant Hoppe came to breakfast with us in our hut next morning, the former told us that he had a man on board who had once been a stone-cutter and that if we agreed he would get him to carve Watkins' name and the date of his death on a large lump of granite just behind the Base.

When this was finished the *Maagen* was ready to set sail. As she passed the mouth of the branch fjord, where Watkins had been drowned, she fired a salute with her small gun and was soon out in the open sea bound for Copenhagen.



RILEY CUTTING WATKINS' HAIR



*. . . for there is nothing  
either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*

SHAKESPEARE

*Habit, and not nature makes almost all our wants.*

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

## CHAPTER VI

### SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

ALTHOUGH the invaluable help of the Captains of the *Gertrud Rask* and *Maagen* had made us less behindhand than we should otherwise have been, there was still a great deal to be done before we could consider ourselves prepared for the winter.

On the 1930-31 expedition I had damaged my knee by falling down a crevasse and had had to have a cartilage removed before coming out this time. Thinking that we would be going to the Antarctic and therefore not leaving England till October, I had postponed this operation till June. When the change of plans necessitated starting for Greenland early in July, I was afraid that I might not get the muscles strong enough in time.

My fears were soon justified. The leg seemed quite all right when I was walking long distances at Scoresby Sound at the end of July, but even then a little water had formed; during August and September more and more fluid had collected round the knee-cap until, by the time we got back to Lake Fjord with the *Maagen*, I could hardly walk at all, and the knee was so swollen that the knee-cap was scarcely discernible. It was obvious that if I was going to be of any use for sledging and hunting in the winter I must go to bed and rest my leg for a month or more, which was most annoying.

Here are our activities for the next few months grouped under various headings.

#### *Weather*

For the rest of September the temperature was consistently about ten degrees warmer than it had been in



CROTONSILLY CARVED WOOD



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

August, while on some days it was phenomenally warm; on September 18th, for instance, the thermometer reached 61.5° F. at midday, though the minimum temperature at night was 29° F. But as a rule it stayed round about 30°-35° F., dropping a little lower at night. It was not yet cold enough for the sea to freeze over, but in still weather a spreading crescent of ice would be formed where the fresh water from the river flowed out into the fjord.

Lying on my bed all day at the open window I could watch the daily advance of winter. The position of the Base was so overshadowed by mountains that by September 19th it was too dark by 5.0 P.M. to continue work on the house, although the sun still lit up the hill-tops which were by now sprinkled with the first permanent snow of autumn; an hour later it would be quite dark outside. So rapid is the approach of the Arctic winter that by the middle of October it was already twilight at 2.0 P.M., and by the end of November we could only work outside for three or four hours in the middle of the day.

At night there was a wonderful view from the window where I lay nursing my wretched knee. Aquila, the Eagle, and the great square of Pegasus I could see above the steep hills opposite me, while Orion's jewelled belt hung slantwise between the mountains at the mouth of the fjord, pointing to Aldebaran, the brightest star of Taurus, with the friendly Pleiades beside. It is good to "acquaint thyself with the choragium of the stars"; one becomes strangely familiar with the bright stars when human companionship is so limited. Each constellation assumes, through the years, a personality and a character of its own. In boyhood one first claimed acquaintanceship, perhaps in those days almost kinship, with the little twinkling stars seen through the comfortable glass of a nursery window. Later on, walking home beneath their steadfast gaze from long happy days' fishing or among mountains, they became more remote and aloof, yet still wondrous. Gradually

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

the more conspicuous constellations became known by name.

The Scorpion, Archer and He Goat,  
The Man who carries the Watering Pot,  
The Fish with glittering tails.

Finally, as surveyors, using the stars with mathematical precision to work out our position to within a few yards, we attained with the theodolite greater knowledge and understanding; while the frozen hours spent steering sledges by their high constancy revived the sense of their friendliness.

At the beginning of October there was no ice on the fjord. The sun would leave us soon after midday, but would illuminate the hills till 4.0 P.M. After the middle of the month the sun ceased to shine on the Base except to begin with for a few minutes in the morning, when we saw it for a short time through a gap in the hills. On cloudless days, although the sun itself was invisible, we were still cheered by plenty of colour: crimson reflections on the water, deep velvety shadows in the snow-covered valleys and a rose-tinted flush on the hill-tops. But on cloudy days in October, and continually after the end of the month, the drab and dismal grey of the sky reflected in the snow and water would have been depressing, if we had not had sufficient work to keep us busy. Long after the sun had left our fjord it still lit up the mountains on the far side of Nigertusok. From the Base we looked up the low valley containing the lake to see this great vertical wall of rock, coloured red by the winter sun, looking for all the world like a bit of stage scenery.

On October 2nd the temperature was up to 45° F. in the night, and during the day sensible waves of hot air blew up and down the fjord: throughout the winter we had these sudden periods of warmth, even accompanied by rain. In calm weather, each morning innumerable pancakes of new ice with their edges darkened and raised by bumping into each other covered the water like dust. In the second week



RYMILL STEERING THE WHALE-BOAT



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

of October a big swell came in from the open sea, accompanied by much brash-ice and a dozen icebergs, about forty feet in height, which remained in the fjord till the following summer. Sometimes snow settling on the water would congeal into an inch or so of slushy ice making it difficult to force the *Stella* through; but it was not till the end of September that we had the first real snowfall, covering the ground down to sea-level.

We had little wind, though sometimes the barometer would fall surprisingly low and there would be every symptom of a coming gale.

October 15th was the first day that the temperature failed to rise above freezing all day; by then the ground was frozen like iron and all smaller streams were muted. There was no ice on the lake till the 18th, but four days later there were four inches all over it and by the end of the month it was almost a foot thick. The sea was still prevented from freezing by a heavy swell. A considerable number of solid floes of pack-ice had been blown to the head of the fjord where they crashed and ground against the *Stella*, doing considerable damage. These floes looked harmless enough as they floated about low down in the water, and it was not till the ebb tide left them stranded on the beach that we saw each one was considerably bigger than the *Stella* herself.

In November when the swell was so great that rollers were breaking on the shore, we found one morning that the tiller of the *Stella* had been smashed by the ice, and the rudder carried away, while one side of the whale-boat was completely stove in. The gale producing this swell also removed most of the snow from the hills where it had lain about six inches deep. However, on November 17th and 18th nearly a foot of snow fell, and as we sometimes had 20 degrees of frost in the night the sea at last began to freeze over. On November 20th the temperature never rose above 20° F. all day. Only the movement of the water prevented it from freezing over, and this was stilled with amazing suddenness

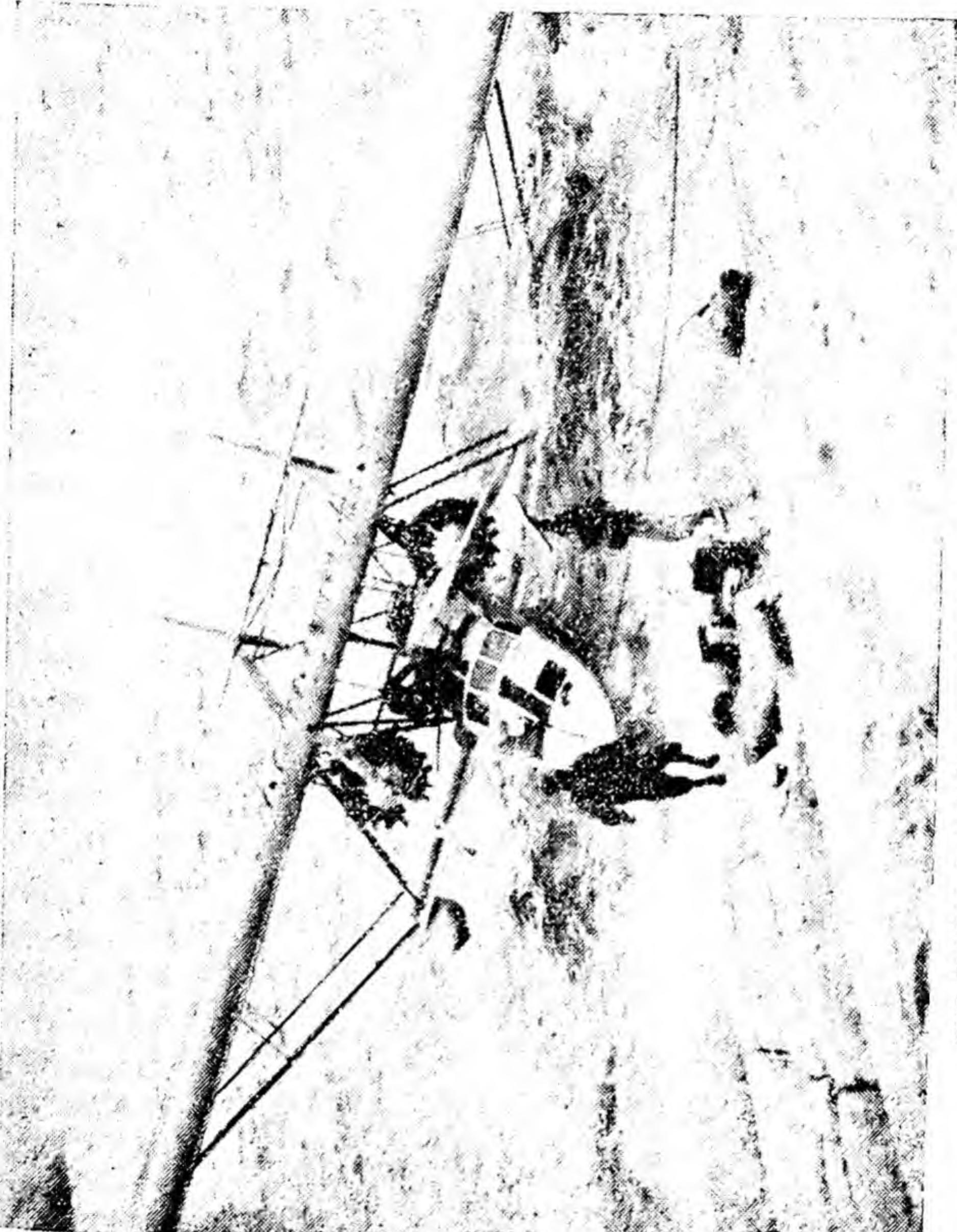
## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

when, on November 22nd, the mouth of our fjord and most of Nigertusok was steadily filled by a sea of close pack-ice drifting in from outside. A week before no ice could be seen out to sea, but now from the hill above the Base the pack-ice stretched as far as one could see except where it was darkened by a few leads of open water. Towards the end of the month the temperature sometimes dropped to within a degree of zero, and by November 26th, a month later than at our old Base in 1930, the sea-ice was at last bearing on the fjord.

### *Food and Domestic Life*

It is extraordinary how one can get into the habit of eating very little food. We were short of seal-meat in the autumn, the supply of fish ran out in mid-September and we were saving as many birds as we could for winter food; consequently we were reduced to civilised provisions of which in any case we had to be sparing. Between us we ate about a pound of flour each day. To begin with we used to cook flat-cakes in the frying-pan, but soon we learnt to make extremely good baking-powder bread in the oven. As it took us some time to reach proficiency in the art of baking, it is worth recording that we eventually used almost four times as much baking powder as the directions advised; we would knead it with terrific vigour and then bake it in a previously heated oven for about two hours. Incidentally we discovered that bread-making is by far the best way of cleaning one's hands.

Since I was kept indoors on account of my knee I became more ambitious than the others and made cakes and even pastry. On an average day we would have for breakfast, porridge—we only needed a small plateful each—with milk (Nestlé's) and sugar, a slice of toast and marmalade and about a quart of tea. When the days were still fairly long we would have a quick lunch of bread and jam at midday and dispense with afternoon tea, having a big meal of



THE FLYING FAMILY'S AEROPLANE SHORTLY BEFORE SINKING



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

Guillemot or seal-meat in the evening; but when, after October, we had to make the most of the meagre daylight, we would have a meal at two or three o'clock when it got dark and another one at eight. Sundays we would celebrate by running the Union Jack up the makeshift flagstaff we had put up on the "little house" and by opening a tin of fruit.

Perhaps the most important qualification of an Arctic cook is to be able to serve up seal-meat in as great a variety of palatable forms as possible. Stefansson would tell you that one kind of meat cooked daily in the same way ought to satisfy anybody, and though I should be perfectly happy living continually on boiled seal-meat if necessary, I must admit that I prefer variety. When we had plenty of seal-meat we would have the liver fried for breakfast—(incidentally raw seal's liver is one of the best antiscorbutics you can take) then the ribs or flippers boiled for lunch, and in the evening, when we had more time to spare, we would be more ambitious: we would try various kinds of steak, mince and stew. Perhaps the best way of cooking seal-meat is to cut it into small cubes and then to fry it with potatoes and onion. Another excellent way is to fry slices of the meat for five minutes in a hot frying-pan, and then to stir a cupful of flour into the fat, add two cupfuls of boiling water and then stew for twenty minutes.

We were lucky in having several bags of dried potatoes. After soaking them overnight, boiling them, and then beating up with Nestlé's milk and butter they were quite good, and stopped us eating too much meat when that was scarce.

Seal-meat is usually tender if cooked while still warm, otherwise it is best soaked for several days.

One day when the other two were out working I made a most delectable polar bear and seal's liver pie, covering it with a layer of pastry. Unfortunately, as I was lifting it out of the oven, it slipped out of my hands and fell upside down in the coal-scuttle. But although its looks were ruined it still tasted very good! Bear-meat is very acceptable for a

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

change, though inclined to be rather tough and stringy. But however large the bear, as long as it has plenty of blubber, it is usually tender. It is certainly better than dog or fox.

It is extraordinary how useless ordinary cookery books are to an expedition cook: nearly every recipe starts off: "Take six eggs and a cupful of cream . . ." or "Carefully weigh out half a pound of fresh mushrooms . . .": but one learns a lot by experiment, and anyhow on an expedition one must not be too fussy.

At first anybody who could spare the time used to do the cooking and housework, but as this usually devolved upon Riley, who in any case had to be about to do the meteorological work at 10.0 A.M. and 4.0 P.M. and again at 10.0 P.M., and as we got later and later at getting up in the morning, we soon found it better each to take a week in turn. One man would then get up at 7.0 A.M. to get breakfast ready, and he would be responsible for the other meals and keeping the hut clean, while the other two would do all the washing-up.

I had now been in bed since the middle of September because of my knee. After a few days the water decreased, but it was a month before I could do much walking. Although I had dreaded this inactivity more than anything, it was really quite pleasant lying on my bunk by the open window. There was nothing of the curtained-bedroom atmosphere of the invalid: as we had only one room I saw the others most of the time and could do quite a lot of small jobs to justify my presence. I washed up, puttied and tacked the panes of glass into our double window frames, reeled skeins of fishing line, sorted nails and did any sewing that was necessary. One day Riley—who liked to dress as smartly as possible—asked me to put a large patch in the seat of a pair of his grey flannel trousers, and supplied me with an old worn-out pair for patching. He was very pleased with the result—so was I, but when he came to put

## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

them on it appeared that I had cut the patch out of the wrong garment.

The question of appearance is rather important when a few men are wintering together. We felt that as we had to bear the sight of each other for the whole year we might as well look as little like tramps as possible. So we used to shave about twice a week, and keep our clothes as clean and respectable as we could. It is an interesting fact that the shorter the time a man has been in the Arctic, the longer he grows his beard. A budding explorer will come back from his first summer expedition looking like Abraham and mumbling excuses about it being good protection against the mosquitoes; but if he winters in the Arctic he soon finds out that a beard is quite impracticable, as in cold weather his breath freezes on to it, and cements it firmly to his helmet or anything else that is near.

Although it would be difficult to find three people more different in ideas and upbringing, it was remarkable how well we got on together. I suppose we were sometimes furious with each other, but we had the sense to realise that we would have to spend the winter together anyhow, and if we were not in harmony life would be quite unbearable; on the other hand, if we made the best of each other's company and did not look for trouble there was no reason at all why we should quarrel. Here is a typical entry in my diary:

*October 5th.* John massaged my knee for half an hour this evening. I started reading *The Right Place* aloud, but we soon began a great argument about the beginning of the world and the origin of life. I am a confirmed optimist, and in spite of frequent disappointments would find life dull and unbearable otherwise. Quintin is a supreme pessimist and revels in it, while John says he is naturally an optimist but makes himself pessimistic to avoid disappointment, life is then full of pleasant surprises.

Quintin is happiest when arguing, and whatever

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

happens insists on having the last word ; he and John have most abusive arguments. Personally as I see arguments in a different light—as an exchange of ideas rather than a competition of wit, I usually avoid controversy, especially as I have never achieved the invaluable art of arguing fiercely without rancour. On the last expedition the argument that continued longest was whether you say “eggs and bacon” or “bacon and eggs.” But on this trip we all say the former—even Quintin ! This morning I objected to John using the word “pants” for what I call “trousers”; I consider it an Americanism. John replied that for years he had been annoyed on sledging journeys by my calling what he called a pot, a pan. So we have made a treaty to respect our mutual prejudices. I shall call a pan a pot, and he will call pants trousers !

If one must be indoors I can’t imagine a more delightful life than this, just to work away at a bit of wood—making something, listening to the gramophone, hearing the evening meal sizzling in the frying-pan, while the dogs howl outside and snow patters on the window panes, and then after supper to read till midnight. . . .

In the winter you can get absolutely wild with a man because he washes too much (that is, more than you do yourself) or because he makes rather a noise when he eats: you compare him with friends you know only superficially—as opposed to the almost conjugal intimacy of an expedition—and of course he compares unfavourably. But after you have been back in England for some time you gradually find that your expedition companions are among your real friends; they have something that other people can never have.

The gramophone caused continual discussion: we had only about 20 records—no one would admit to having chosen them—most of which were simply awful: the usual sentimental female voice crooning about love and honey as the mo-on comes over the mo-ountains.

I held that music of some sort was a necessity and that it



THE "STELLA" ANCHORED IN FRONT OF THE BASE



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

was better to make the best of what records we had than to go without altogether. I was, therefore, furious with the others when they continually ridiculed and burlesqued our records so that it became quite impossible to play them at all.

Being an isolated community, like a school, we gradually developed a special language of our own, derived from the more amusing essays in the English tongue on the part of foreigners we had lately met, the Eskimo language, and phrases picked up out of books we had all read.

After mid-November it was dark by about 1.30 P.M. and after that hour there was little else to do except read. Having a lot of energy to work off I spent a great deal of time carpentering—making chairs, bookcases and shelves for the water tub and for all our kitchen utensils.

“A place for everything and nothing in its place” had been one of the slogans of the last expedition, and this time we made special efforts to reverse this. My bunk was the chief blot because I always seemed to have so many more possessions than the others. Each evening before I could get into my bed I had to pile on to the floor several firearms and hunting instruments, a pile of books, dog whips, a few still and cinematograph cameras—the latter usually in pieces—a number of bird skins in various stages of completion and innumerable smaller objects; there were also piles of spare clothes and seal skins, but I usually contrived to sleep on top of them. We used to sleep in single eider-down sleeping-bags, weighing only two or three pounds, although the temperature of the house used to fall quite low at night. To save coal we did not generally light the stove till we had finished outside work for the day, but by the evening the temperature was usually up to 70° F. and the air got so foul that the lamp would almost go out. The hut, being built of new unseasoned wood, was singularly damp. The walls were usually running wet, while every nailhead would collect drops of water. At the beginning of the winter I hung my firearms from the roof just above my bunk, but so much

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

moisture condensed on them that water would be continually dripping on to my face as I tried to get to sleep at night. Besides that the roof leaked abominably and the inner wall, buckled with the damp, left gaps through which the wind blew incessantly.

“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” seems to me the ideal motto for an expedition, whether it is applied to food, equipment or the discomforts of a sledging trip. Almost any Polar problem can be solved if one approaches it with unbiased mind and is willing to learn from the Eskimos, who have been struggling with many of the same problems for thousands of years.

### *Hunting*

During the autumn we were often very short of fresh food and had to resort to buying seals from the Eskimos to feed our clamorous dogs. After September 13th we took no more salmon in the nets; apparently they had all gone up to the lake and we would have to wait till the lake froze over and we could hang a net beneath the ice. We thought we were beyond the range of cod, but one day the natives brought some over from the next fjord. They had seen them once or twice in September, and on October 18th they caught several in their usual way, by attaching a tag of crimson and white cloth just above three large hooks held together in a lump of lead, and then pulling it vigorously up and down just clear of the bottom in fairly deep water. The cod, attracted by the flash of colour, are then foul-hooked and easily dragged to the surface. This method of fishing is usually done from the kayak; near the more southern settlements where cod are plentiful ten or fifteen can be caught in an hour. The stomachs of these cod were filled with shrimps, but although shrimps were very plentiful at Lake Fjord we never got any cod there, though Rymill and I used to go and fish for them from the dinghy. We also tried shark fishing, but here again we were unlucky, though we

GINO WATKINS  
AGED 25 DROWNED AUG. 20  
1932 IN THIS FJORD

D. H. D.

THE CROSS



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

carefully groundbaited first with pieces of seal blubber attached to stones. The sea was never smooth enough to allow us to keep fishing just over the place where we had dropped the bait.

From the beginning of October till the sea froze over, we used to go out shooting sea-birds from the *Stella*. This was perhaps the most profitable of our various hunting methods. Throughout the autumn Black Guillemots were very plentiful out in the main fjord and on the open coast, and sometimes we would get the larger Brunnich's Guillemot, which rarely ventures into the fjords. The Guillemots were usually in pairs or in small parties of six or seven. We would approach them, one man handling the boat and the other waiting in the bows with a 12-bore shot gun. When we were within a couple of hundred yards we would run the motor dead slow and gradually get within range. As there was usually a heavy swell, shooting was not as easy as might be expected, especially as a long shot rarely had any effect on their dense plumage. They usually dived rather than flew away, and we would sometimes follow one bird for a considerable time before he came up within range, and then it was a case of rapid snap-shooting before he dived again. There were always a few Glaucous and Iceland Gulls about and, once one had been shot, others could often be decoyed within range by whistling and by flapping the dead bird. After mid-October, parties of Eider and Long-tailed Ducks visited the fjords; these were very much sought after, being even more palatable than the Guillemots. On a good day's shooting we would bring back perhaps twenty Black Guillemots, two Brunnich's Guillemots, an Eider, a brace of Long-tails and an odd Gull.

On October 10th we saw a most unusual sight. There was no wind, but low cloud, mist and falling snow restricted the visibility to about half a mile. Out by Ailsa the sea was suddenly alive with birds. Whereas formerly we had seen only one or two Brunnich's Guillemots a day,

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

here we saw literally hundreds. Flock after flock of Little Auks were going south, either flying or swimming in their jerky way upon the water. We saw more Black Guillemots in an hour than we had seen during the rest of the autumn. Owing to the poor visibility it was impossible to estimate the numbers of these migrating birds. The day before we had seen only the usual number, and two days later the Brunnich's Guillemots and Little Auks had passed on; only a few Black Guillemots remained. We shot a good many Brunnich's Guillemots that day before we ran out of cartridges. We removed the guts of these birds and without plucking or skinning them hung them up by hundreds in the "little house," where they soon froze solid and supplied us with fresh meat till well into the winter.

Rymill and I had lost our kayaks on the occasion of our nearly losing the *Stella*, so the most productive way of hunting seals was denied to us until Enock had finished making a new kayak for Rymill and covering with skins the one I had had made at Angmagssalik. After September seals are usually fairly plentiful if there is any pack-ice about, and then it is much easier than in spring and summer to capture them by kayak, as in autumn the seal will float when shot, thus rendering the complicated harpoon technique quite unnecessary. In September, when I was laid up, and the other two were busy getting things settled in for the winter, no seal hunting could be carried on, though in any case at that time there were not many about.

In October when we were bird shooting from the *Stella* we sometimes tried to stalk seals, but it is very difficult indeed to shoot them from a small boat. Sometimes the seal would be seen sleeping on its back with its nose in the air, or playing in the water quite oblivious of approaching danger; but to shoot such a small mark as a seal's head with a rifle, from a boat which is bobbing up and down, is almost impossible, and it is rarely that one can get within range for a shot-gun. The fjord seal will dive for five or six minutes and then will



HAULING IN THE FISHING NET



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

stay up for about a quarter of a minute or even less. We would sometimes wait till the seal dived and then rush in the motor boat to where we expected him to come up again, but it was usually impossible to predict this with sufficient accuracy to get a shot, and we might play hide-and-seek with a seal for an hour before he would see us and make his escape.

Riley is not fond of shooting, and Rymill, having hunted big game in many countries of the world, finds little excitement in shooting seals, but for my part I am never so happy as when up against their cunning. I am distinctly ashamed of myself when I shoot a Polar bear; once one has got within range it is like going into a field and shooting a cow, except that bears are infinitely nicer and more human than cows. And as far as birds are concerned, it has always seemed to me singularly inconsistent to spend half one's time watching birds with loving æsthetic appreciation and the other half shooting them down like clay pigeons. But seals are different. I do not love seals. For me there is something sinister about that shiny bullet head and those unblinking watery eyes. Whether it is the ferocious bladder-nose, the shy and unapproachable bearded, or the inquisitive fjord seal, I look on them as cunning, cold-blooded enemies and not the warm-blooded sea-mammals they really are. I am never so happy as when waiting hour after hour by the side of a lead watching the jealous shadow-fingers of approaching night darken the high snows, and the delicate tracery of newly-formed ice-crystals dull the gleaming water, till all at once my whole being is tense with excitement, my heart leaps up within me—a small dark head has suddenly rippled the still water and is moving swiftly across the lead, sometimes dipping beneath the surface. I am so excited I can hardly hold the rifle still; I set the sights and stealthily lie on the ice; just as I am ready to shoot I give a low wavering whistle; the movement of the snake-like head abruptly stops: Bang! As the echoes reverberate and reverberate from mountain to mountain, I see with an intense

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

thrill the eddies spreading from the dark object floating low in the water. I think of the mornings I have left my warm sleeping-bag while it is still dark; of the long hours I have spent there in the cold seeing no sign of any living thing, of the seals that dived just as my finger closed on the trigger, of the shots I have missed by miscalculating distance or allowing myself to get too excited. As I drag the seal home to the Base, I contemplate boiled ribs for supper and succulent fried liver and kidneys for breakfast. Before the fjord froze over I shot six or seven seals from the shore, using a .256 Mannlicher Shoener with a telescopic sight, and would then row out to recover them with the small boat. Sometimes I used to go out at dawn and wait on an ice-floe for the seals, which at that hour seem more numerous and less timid.

On the last trip to the next fjord in the *Stella* we had brought the kayaks back with us, so now Rymill and I could have a few days kayak-hunting before the sea froze over. To begin with, on November 16th, we practised some rolling. My new kayak was so steady compared with my old one that I felt a hundred times safer than I had ever felt before: I think the stability of a kayak is regulated by the angle of the sides rather than the depth or width, for this kayak was two inches narrower than my last one and much lower in the water. Although the temperature of the sea was several degrees below freezing, it was not very cold rolling, although we both felt a slight pain between the eyes after the first roll or two; but we had the usual trouble with our seal-skin clothes: having no Eskimos at the Base the kayak-coats had not been properly looked after and consequently had gone rather stiff and hard. It was impossible to achieve a watertight join where the kayak-coat ties round the face, unless one pulled the sliding thong so tight as to be agonising; the same applied to the wrists, where thongs are supposed to tie tightly over the tops of seal-skin gloves. By the time we had finished, we were



EAST COAST SLEDGING WITH SINGLE TRACE



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

both soaked from head to foot. Usually the bottom of the kayak-coat has a way of pulling off the circular ring surrounding the entrance to the kayak, just when one is upside down executing some especially skilful movement. The kayak then becomes half full of water so that soon the inside of one's boots are wet, and the next time one rolls, the water runs down inside the jacket even filling one's ears.

There was a very heavy swell coming in from the fjord mouth and this was accentuated over the sandy shallows till there were quite large rollers; it was very exciting to wait till the kayak was poised on the crest of one of these waves and then to paddle furiously: one seemed to be going continuously down a steep hill like a surf rider. We found the swell was very unsettling when it came broadside on, but as soon as we got into the way of not consciously trying to balance it was much easier. But these seas were calm water to what a kayak can stand. In 1931, at Cape Farewell, Watkins met an Eskimo who had recently been blown out to sea for four days in a phenomenal storm: he had had to roll his kayak many times.<sup>1</sup>

There were only a few days now before the fjord froze over and, although we made the most of them, our lack of practice combined with the continuous swell in the fjord prevented us from getting any seals. A page from my diary best describes the possibilities of this winter kayak-hunting:

*November 18th.* Shot a seal from the window of the hut this morning—stomach crammed full of white and rust-coloured shrimps. John and I went out kayaking: swell much less but still enough to debar accurate rifle shooting. Owing to the recent heavy snowfall several inches of freezing slush in some places makes it almost impossible to get through, even taking it in turn to force

<sup>1</sup> There is some evidence that in the eighteenth century Eskimo Kayakmen actually reached the Orkneys. See *The Polar Record*, Number 7, p. 52.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

a track. We chased a seal we had seen far out, but it came up just behind and saw us. It was fun being swirled up and down by the waves when we kept near the shore. Suddenly I saw a bearded seal playing on the surface of the water; as I raced after him, he dived, showing all his great body. He appeared after the usual fifteen minutes only two hundred yards away, swimming along the surface with his head immersed to his bristling white moustache, and his wide back showing. I kept motionless, crouching behind the screen as he swam towards me; when he turned I paddled rapidly but silently towards him till I was forty yards away and my kayak still approaching him, I swung a little to the left, then pushed the paddle in under the seal-skin thong on the right (this left both hands free and, acting as an outrigger, steadied the kayak) removed my right-hand glove with my teeth and pulled my double-barrelled shot gun from its waterproof cover on the kayak deck. The sideways drag of the paddle in the water had by now pulled the kayak round so that I was pointing directly at the seal. I was just raising the gun to my shoulder when he saw me and with a terrific splash he dived—or rather sounded. Ten minutes later he came up near the shore, he was porpoising along taking short dives of fifteen or twenty yards. I raced to where I expected him to come up next time, but the old devil had turned sharply at right angles and he suddenly put his head up on one side of my kayak and only ten yards away. I kept absolutely still, but he saw me, lifted his head right out of the water, and dived with a monumental splash. We saw him no more. John hunted several fjord seals, but didn't get one. The new snow has settled on several dark glass-green icebergs, giving them wonderful modulations of shade, especially when they first loom through the snow-fog. It would be impossible to use a harpoon as ice forms on everything and would freeze the throw-stick to the shaft.



THE BASE AFTER WINTER'S SNOWFALL



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

The whole kayak deck is encrusted with ice, while we have to wash the paddle in the water to stop ice forming too thickly on it. Once John saw a seal leap out of the water on to a floe. It crawled round a bit, slug-like, seemed unsettled by something and then splashed back—surely it's unusual to lie out on the ice in November. John got a shot at a bearded seal at forty yards; it was lying with its nose in the air, its hollowed back submerged and its hind flippers far out of the water. A sudden squall had come on, blowing all the new snow off the icebergs and making it impossible to shoot. A Snowy Owl flew silently over us just then, a young one I think, as he looked rather dark. This is the first one I have seen south of Scoresby Sound. I thought of St. Agnes' Eve: "Ah, bitter chill it was, the owl for all his feathers was a-cold." He looked it! We saw five fjord seals on our way home. For this sort of shooting it would be best to carry both rifle and shot gun on the kayak, though so much deck cargo might make one wobbly. Perhaps the ideal weapon would be one of those combination guns with two shot barrels above and a rifled barrel below.

We got back soon after dark to find Quintin had been planning how to carry on for the winter without us, but luckily he had boiled enough seal-meat for three! At eight o'clock clear sky was showing again, an invisible moon brightly lit up the fresh snow on the hill-tops with a luminous white glow, while the lower slopes and valleys were still in black shadow. Temperature down to 11° F. in the night. . . .

### Dogs

When Riley and I returned in the *Maagen*, we brought with us the six best dogs we could buy in Angmagssalik, though none of them were as good as the West Coast dogs we had had on the 1930-31 expedition. We dare not bring more as we expected to have some difficulty in getting

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

enough food for them during the winter. We wanted just enough to make two teams to travel about during the winter and to sledge down to Angmagssalik in the early spring to buy additional dogs for the more serious survey journeys. Joe and Bill, the two Alsatians, we collected from Enock's settlement as soon as we got back from Angmagssalik, but it was not till October 8th that we found time or room in the boat to bring the other four which Enock had been looking after since August. These were the four Scoresby Sound dogs. Salo (named by the natives after the schoolmaster at Angmagssalik, because they both had such pronounced eye-brows) and his father, Carnera (we gave him this name because he looked as if his face had been trodden on rather heavily) were the finest dogs we had; unfortunately they used to go round beating up the other dogs, so we had always to keep one of them tied up. Sometimes they had terrific fights with each other. Carnera had been the king dog and still exerted a great deal of parental prestige over Salo who, in any case, was a very nervous dog. Carnera was also a much more experienced and hardened fighter. But Salo was very much bigger than his father, and it was clear that he would eventually become the leader. I have never seen animals fight with such bloodthirsty determination as these two, and several times, had we not intervened, I am sure one of them would have been killed. In the periods between the fights Salo would lie on his back and whine submission when Carnera was about, and even relinquish food to him as long as he himself was not too hungry.

It was very interesting to see how the Alsatians fitted in with the Huskies. At first Joe, who was pugnacious and—by English standards—a good fighter, had it all his own way. When two Huskies fight, bluff plays a great part; and once a dog has been rolled over by another, he usually lies there whimpering and imploring forgiveness till the conqueror stalks away, after which he slips off himself. But Joe would attack at once, without any preliminary



LOOKING BACK OVER THE PACK-ICE TO AILSA



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

growling, and if he chanced to be knocked down by another he would continue the fight as soon and for as long as he could. This apparent disregard for the rules completely shook the Eskimo dogs and for a time it looked as if Joe would be the king dog ; but the Huskies usually fought in families, or at any rate in pairs, and first Salo and Carnera, and then the other dogs found that Joe, though clever, was not really so formidable as he seemed, while Bill was in any case a fool.

Huskies have not much idea of sportsmanship. They prefer to go for another dog when there is little chance of retaliation. If two dogs are fighting and one has the other down, any Husky near will join in and go for the one that is helpless. Sometimes you see one unfortunate animal being dragged round by the base of his tail, while half a dozen other dogs are biting at any part of him they can get hold of. At this stage of a fight Bill, not wanting to be out of the fun, would rush into the fray, bite the wrong dog and then seem quite offended when the fight turned on him. Certainly both dogs felt the cold, and once the snow came they seemed visibly to shrink and become more and more subdued and miserable.

There is a general belief that Huskies are the fiercest of dogs. As far as the Greenland dogs are concerned, that is quite incorrect. Many of them are very nervous and are only used to being handled by one man—their driver. Sometimes when you are rounding up a number of dogs, transshipping them and so on, these nervous ones will panic and become half mad with fear ; but even then if you talk to them quietly and put your bare hand right under their noses instead of grabbing them by the scruff of the neck, they will calm down and become docile again. It is only when you grab at them that they snap at you. The wildest dogs become normal when they are in harness and being worked. With all the dogs at the Base I could easily have taken food actually out of their mouths without their even growling. I wonder if that could be done with fox-hounds or even sport-

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

ing dogs? The only time they will attack people is when anybody falls down in front of them and then only exceptionally wild dogs and on very rare occasions. When I was at Egedesminde, in Disco Bay, I saw a child that had been almost bitten to death. She was carrying water buckets from a stream when she suddenly slipped and fell. Immediately four dogs set upon her, and would probably have killed her had a man not heard her screams and come to the rescue.

Toogie, the white dog from Scoresby Sound, named after the only half-wit at Angmagssalik, had apparently become mental too. Though he never tried to bite, he had always suffered from nerves, and while Enock was looking after him he had escaped one day and taken to the hills. However, he had the sense to return to the settlement at night and dig up the seals which Enock had buried for winter provisions. At last Nikolay caught him with a cod hook, and though he nearly went mad with fright if any of us came near him, we hoped to tame him before the sledgeing season started.

As the dogs got fatter and fatter towards winter, fights became less frequent and they soon found out from whom they could snatch food with impunity, and who must be treated with respect.

### *Work*

Our summer had been so interrupted that there was still much work to be done. As I was laid up to begin with, a great deal devolved upon Rymill and Riley. The porch had to be finished and covered with felting and the house needed tying down with thick wire cables in case of gales, while the gap between the bottom of the hut and the ground had to be filled in with rocks and sods. Mikkelsen had left us a small wooden hut about 8 feet by 5; this too had to be erected and wired down. While food supplies would be kept in the loft, the "little house"—as we called it—would be invaluable for storing such things as crowbars and shovels, fishing nets, rope, skis and spare parts for boats and sledges. The porch



FORCING A WAY UP THE FOOT OF THANK GOD GLACIER



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

was fitted with a bench and made into a carpenter's shop; this was not very satisfactory, as all the tools became brown with rust, but it is essential on an expedition to have a workshop of some sort. Our supply of coal was carried up from the shore to a place nearer the hut, while all the stores were sorted and stowed away in the loft. To facilitate this a block and tackle was rigged from a beam over the loft door. A stand was made to keep the kayaks and sledges out of the dogs' reach, for seal skin is one of their favourite forms of nourishment. On sunny days, there was always painting and varnishing to be done on the boats. Not only had we the *Stella* and the whale-boat, but a collapsible boat, presented to the expedition by the Hudson Folding Boat Company. This was extremely useful as a tender to the *Stella*, for visiting the fishing nets and for other odd jobs.

While boating was still possible we wanted to leave a depot of man and dog food at the head of Kangerdlugsuatsiak to assist the sledge journeys to Angmagssalik and to Mount Forel which we hoped to make early in the spring, while sledging conditions would still be difficult. I was in bed, Riley had to stay for the meteorological work, so Rymill had to take the *Stella* alone. After all the sledging rations had been weighed out and packed up in boxes, he set off on September 26th and was away for nearly four days, during which he had a most unpleasant time. He got round Hell Corner all right, finding only a few large icebergs there and low cloud and fog in the fjord. After only seven hours' running from the Base he reached the head of Kangerdlugsuatsiak, and finding a suitable place for the depot, he carried the forty or so heavy boxes up by lantern light, and then slept in the boat, intending to return to Lake Fjord as soon as day should dawn. It snowed all night, and when he departed next morning he met a heavy swell coming far into the fjord. Apparently there had been a storm out to sea. Before he reached Hell Corner the waves became enormous. He felt one isolated puff of wind and before he had time to

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

think of returning, he met the full violence of the gale, and water started pouring in over the bows. For a time he faced it, unable to turn, working the bilge pump with one hand and holding the tiller with the other. Several times he tried to turn, but each time he had to veer back owing to the mountainous seas. He really thought there was no hope for the *Stella*. At last he got her round and still, although he pumped for all he was worth, the waves, swirling in over the stern, were gaining fast. After what seemed an interminable time, he ran into calmer water and decided to wait in North Fjord till the seas should calm down. In the afternoon the *Stella* dragged her anchor and went ashore on an exceptionally high tide. Rymill had to watch the boat most of the night, and next morning she refused to float as the tide did not come up so far. It looked at first as if he would not be able to return to the Base till the freeze-up, but at last, at low tide, he managed to rig up block and tackle from the stern over the anchor which he jammed behind a convenient rock; then at high water, by pulling on the rope, and at the same time getting his shoulder underneath the bows, he managed gradually to get her back to the water. Next day he reached the Base without further adventure.

Several trips had to be made round to Enock's settlement to collect our dogs and kayaks and to buy seals; sometimes these journeys were rather unpleasantly eventful:

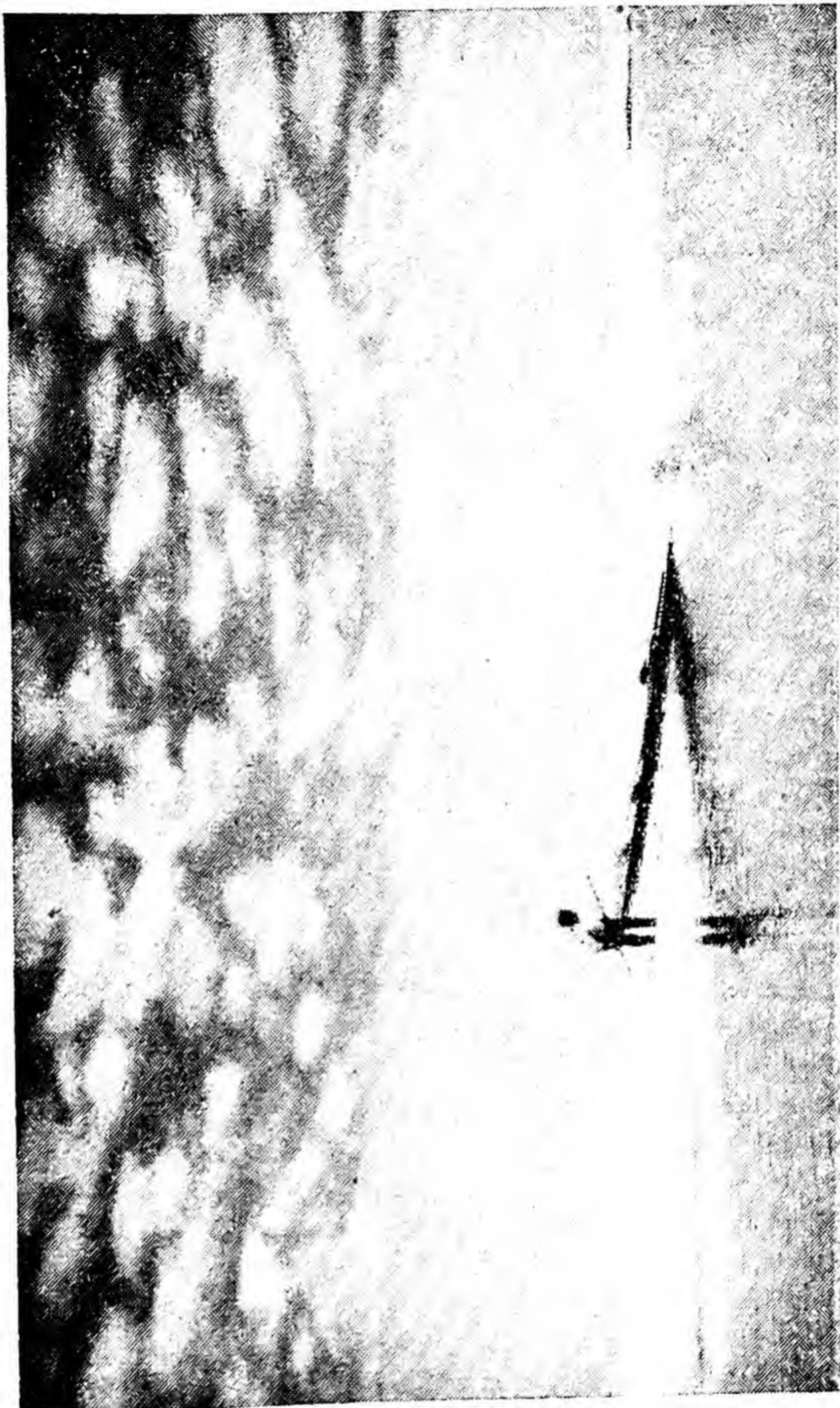
*October 28th.* Dull, overcast, and snow falling. Spent the morning sorting wood and putting it in the tent for winter. John baked bread and sorted survey gear, Quintin tinkering with the *Stella*—usual trouble of ice in exhaust and outlet pipes. Away after lunch. Failed to get a shot at a seal, but got a brace of Long-tails. Reached the winter-house at dusk, they were surprised to see us. Weedymena and Leah were all dolled up in their best beads and topknots; the same idea, I suppose, as the early settlers in the colonies always dressing for dinner. It's odd that they prefer trouser buttons for ear-rings to



THE AUTHOR IN WATERDOCK

Illustration by V. S. S.





A HUNTER PULLING HIS KAYAK OUT ON TO AN ICE-FLOE



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

the more ornate ones we brought from Woolworth's. Enock spent all the evening playing with a bit of tin just like a child : first he would balance it on his nose, then put it on his head, then he would hold it between his toes, and finally he made a boat of it and floated it in the water-bucket. They seemed very glad to see us. Nikolay got two seals to-day. He exchanged one for a pair of old trousers, and we got one from Kidasi for some .22 bullets, and then he had to sell us two more in exchange for a rifle to shoot the bullets !

*October 29th.* Although the blubber lamps were all out by 9 P.M. the house was almost oppressively hot all night, yet, unlike our hut, there is no condensation. Weedy mena baked some cake in a tin with a cloth tied over the top, suspended over the lamps. It was excellent. It is wonderful to think of these eleven people, seventy miles from their nearest Eskimo neighbours, carrying in a single seal-skin boat, not only themselves, but enough gear to make them completely independent of the rest of the world for a year.

We got up early. Before the sun rose, the snowy mountains across the fjord showed deep blue in front of a still darker sky : then a vivid pink glow gradually lit the summits one by one, casting wine-purple shadows below. We loaded up with the four seals and John's and my kayaks, which are almost finished. As we left the fjord powder-snow was smoking from the hill-tops, but as it only fell yesterday that means nothing. Rather a nasty chop in the fjord which got worse as we met a head wind round the corner of the fjord mouth. Here we found a line of brash-ice shepherded by the wind into a closely packed belt, fifty yards or so wide, and heaving with the swell. Waves came curling down it most horribly, and the whole belt was bearing down on us with the wind. Most of it was black ice which is very tough, and usually goes down a long way below water. To force a way

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

through it was out of the question, so we tried to get round the landward end only to find it packed close up to the shore. To get round the other end we had to run almost out to Ailsa, where the waves were much larger and where there was a lot of outlying brash-ice. It was frantically dangerous work trying to dodge the dark and often almost invisible chunks of ice and yet to take the waves in the right way. It would have been too awful if we had had to throw our kayaks overboard again. Spray was coming over all the time, thrown over us by an icy wind blowing from the glaciers in the northern branch of Lake Fjord. The spray froze on to us so that we looked like snowmen by the time we got in, and the *Stella* was coated all over with ice. John has spent all day soldering the kettle.

This was the *Stella*'s last trip of the year to Enoch's fjord, and Riley had a lot of work to do on her before she was ready to be hauled out for winter. On November 13th we got all the natives to come over, and having made a slip-way, with block and tackle we hauled both the *Stella* and the whaleboat out on to land. This left only the collapsible boat for various jobs that were still to be done.

With some large beams left over from the hut we had made a cross, in memory of Watkins, which we wanted to erect on the point between the two branches of Lake Fjord. Rymill put it together and I spent several days carving the inscription upon it. Towards the end of November, just before the fjord froze over, we towed it up to the point, using the outboard motor on the collapsible boat; then, having carried the cross up to a suitable place on the headland, Riley read the Burial service.

From here there is a wonderful view: out to sea the massive pyramid of Ailsa dominates the fjord, while far inland, away beyond the head of Lake Fjord, the steep pinnacle of Ingolf, the highest mountain on this stretch of coast, can just be seen towering magnificently far above all surround-



KNUD RASMUSSEN ON BOARD THE "KIVIOQ"



## SETTLING IN FOR WINTER

ing peaks. Surely Gino himself would have chosen just such a place to be set apart to his memory.

Fear no more the heat of the sun,  
Nor the furious winter rages,  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages,  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
Like chimney sweepers, come to dust.

*A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.*

W. H. DAVIES

## CHAPTER VII

### WINTER MONTHS

ANYONE who tries to live in East Greenland must resign himself to having his plans, and indeed his whole way of life, regulated by the vagaries of the weather.

On the 1930-31 Expedition we had been prevented by a series of frequent and terrific blizzards from doing any serious travelling on the coast from the end of October till April; though on odd days between the gales the hard-beaten snow provided an excellent surface for sledging. These same gales prevented the pack-ice freezing on to the coast, and indeed continually broke up the sea-ice even well into the fjords. Although this stopped us doing the projected journeys on the sea-ice, the almost continual presence of open water gave more opportunities for seal-hunting, an occupation which not only provided us with fresh food, but which kept both men and dogs fit during the winter months.

At Lake Fjord, though little more than a hundred miles further north than the 1930-31 Base, the winter conditions were entirely different. During the whole year we experienced no wind of more than 40 miles per hour. Within a mile or two of the 1930-31 Base the Ice Cap itself came right down to the sea, and the cold wind sliding faster and faster down the smooth inclined plane of the inland ice would be blowing a full gale by the time it was concentrated still more by the natural funnel between the mountains at the head of the Base Fjord.

But at Lake Fjord we were separated from the Ice Cap by a belt of high mountainous land as much as eighty or ninety miles in width; and where the Ice Cap actually meets these mountains it is still about 8,000 feet above sea-level, so that the wind would not have time really to get up speed before

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

being dissipated in the labyrinth of glaciers and mountain ranges. We rarely experienced any strong wind from the direction of the Ice Cap; such gales as we had usually came down the coast from the north-east.

The chief result of the lack of violent winds was that the snow, of which we had an inordinate amount, lay on the ground sometimes to a depth of twelve or fifteen feet; and as no wind-crust was formed on top of the snow it was impossible to do any serious sledgeing till the rain, and the warmth of the spring sunshine, caused a thaw-crust to form.

We had a spell of fine weather at the end of November, when the fjord froze over, but in December and January it was snowing—or raining—almost two days out of three, and as there are in any case but few hours of daylight in these winter months there was little to do except to occupy ourselves indoors. I am always being asked, “What did you do with yourselves in the long, dark winter? Don’t you get terribly bored? Are you on speaking terms with each other when the sun at last returns?” and so on. Perhaps in the old days, when the men of a wintering party were usually older than we were, and therefore more set in their ideas, quarrels, or at any rate a strained atmosphere, may have been usual: one gathers so reading between the lines of the accounts of the early Polar explorers. In those days, too, there was the continual dread of scurvy, increased by the harrowing tales of those who first wintered in the Polar regions. But we knew that with a certain amount of fresh meat, and orange juice<sup>1</sup> if that failed, we need not fear scurvy; while we had quite enough work to occupy energy which might otherwise have been spent in quarrelling.

<sup>1</sup> On the 1930–31 Expedition we used concentrated lemon juice as an antiscorbutic. This was so efficient that when Courtauld lived for six months entirely on tinned foods he had no symptoms of scurvy. But on this expedition we had left England in such a hurry that there was not enough time to prepare the lemon juice, so we took California orange juice instead.

## WINTER MONTHS

In the short summer, when one wants to make the most of good weather and continuous daylight, work is somewhat rushed, and a mass of roughly collected data is put aside to be consolidated and sorted out in the calm of winter. Equipment must be repaired and preparations made for the coming season's work. The surveyor makes fair copies of his maps, works out computations and prepares for the spring journeys; the naturalist labels his collections and sorts them out; the photographer develops films and repairs his cameras, while the meteorologist is, of course, occupied throughout the year. As well as the work connected with the house, there are always things to be done—rope dog-harnesses and traces to be spliced, boats and sledges to be built and repaired, dog whips to be made, ski bindings to be fixed on, kettles to be soldered and tools to be sharpened.

The problem of getting fresh meat was fairly acute, though we still had some guillemots left from the autumn shooting, and a diminishing supply of seal-meat for the dogs, who needed little while they were comfortable and not working very hard; we intended to start shark-fishing as soon as weather and ice conditions allowed.

At the end of October, Rymill skied up to the lake, cut a number of holes in the ice with his ice-chisel,<sup>1</sup> and ground-baited them with barley and rice. Although he fished there several times and left night-lines with all sorts of enticing baits, ranging from a paste of seal-blood and flour to a guillemot's eye, he saw no sign of any fish.

Towards the end of November we sledged up to the lake, I sitting precariously on the top of a load consisting of the trammel net and a large box of dynamite. Owing to the

<sup>1</sup> The ice-chisel is an ordinary stout chisel, from an inch to two inches wide, attached to a pole; it is used for cutting holes in the ice. The ice-spear consists of a similar pole, to one end of which is attached a blunt metal rod about six inches long and the thickness of one's little finger; it is used for testing uncertain ice. The metal for both these implements must be tempered so that it is not brittle.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

recent thaw, there were six inches of slush on top of the ice and we were afraid the explosive might not work; however, by pushing the detonators well into the sticks of dynamite they exploded beautifully and we blew a row of six holes about ten feet apart. Only the two end holes are needed once the net is set, but the others are necessary to pass beneath the ice a rope attached to the net. This was done by tying the rope to the end of a flexible wooden pole which was pushed under the ice from hole to hole. The ice was at this time little more than a foot in thickness, but the water of the lake was so cloudy that the pole was not visible six inches below the surface. It was, therefore, a tedious job to get the rope the whole way underneath before we could pull the net into position. We weighted the net in the centre and at each end with stones, to make it hang vertically, with the lower part of the net just off the bottom. In the place we had chosen, neither in the middle of the lake nor yet at the edge, the depth was about seven fathoms.

The first few times we revisited the net there was nothing there, which was disappointing, and it was always a ticklish job hacking away the new ice which had formed over the holes without cutting through the rope. At last, on November 29th, six fine salmon were found in the net. Their general colour was crimson, with dark green backs, white bellies and pale spots on their sides. Their stomachs were empty except for a little roe, and they were very much out of condition. The largest, for instance, though it was twenty-nine inches long and had a tail spread of six inches, was only five inches in depth and weighed but seven pounds: a fish of those dimensions in good condition should weigh about twelve pounds. The flesh was pinkish coloured and of rather insipid flavour, but at least provided a change for us after two months without fish.

During the whole winter we caught about 80 fish in the net, the average weight of which would be about 3 lb. The larger ones—we caught several of between six and ten



KARALI STEERING THE "STELLA"



## WINTER MONTHS

pounds—were always out of condition, with protruding lower jaws and gaunt heads. The Eskimos said they could differentiate between the crimson char which live permanently in the lake and the more silvery fish which go down to the sea when the ice breaks up. But to me there appeared to be every gradation between the deepest of crimson and a silvery green with only tinges of red. Except for traces of roe and once a few particles of green matter, the stomachs of all the fish taken in the lake were quite empty. One day we found in the net the stomach alone of a medium-sized fish; we were never able to account for this.

It was some time before we could capture any seals. A few days after the fjord froze over, a number of ice-floes which were stranded on the shore at the head of the fjord floated again with a very high tide and broke up the newly formed ice for several hundred yards. This took some time to freeze over again and effectually cut us off from the stronger ice, on which several seals were seen lying out till December 2nd, while the weather remained fairly warm. Then several feet of snow fell on this broken ice, the warmth of which prevented it freezing properly for some days. Once, when Enock was staying at the Base, we learned a special way of dealing with this rotten ice, through which it was quite impossible to force a boat, yet which was too treacherous to support a man, even on skis.<sup>1</sup> Enock, dividing his weight between his kayak and his skis, crouched astride over the kayak and pushed it forward with his hands. If one ski went through he could usually take his weight on his hands, but if both went through together he would subside into the kayak. If the ice was so thin that the kayak itself went right through, he would then abandon his skis, get right

<sup>1</sup> The East Coast Eskimos learnt the use of skis from a Norwegian ship which wintered in Angmagssalik harbour in the 'nineties. They use them continually over land and on the sea-ice. On the West Coast I did not see a single Greenlander on skis.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

into the kayak and jerk himself forward till the kayak once more ran out on to ice strong enough to bear his weight. This was very hard work, especially for Rymill, who was so heavy that his kayak was continually in the water, even where Enock could walk on skis. When once we reached the firm older ice we could walk safely, dragging our kayaks, out to the edge, where there were pools of open water between angular pieces of ice, split off from the main sheet by the swell. We could hear the latter muttering and roaring further out to sea.

We got two seals—the only ones we saw. One of these was a type of fjord seal one occasionally finds, so inquisitive that it seems to have no fear; Enock shot at it three times with his .22 rifle, and it then came within twenty yards to get a better view of him. One of the seals had in its stomach, as well as the usual shrimps, a number of small Polar cod, a fish resembling the ordinary cod but darker coloured and rarely exceeding 2 lb. in weight.

Hunting at the edge of the open water was not very productive, but when the leads, and the stretch of open water beyond, at last froze over, we could try another method of seal hunting:

*January 15th.* Temperature down to zero most days now, a good 10° colder than at the 1930–31 Base. Rymill and Riley up to lake; I went out hunting with Enock. Took with me retriever,<sup>1</sup> rifle-rest, field glasses, rifle (Mannlicher Shoener .256) and ice-spear. The new ice is dark-coloured and has a pattern all over it like a Dunlop golf ball—dark dots two inches across and four to six

<sup>1</sup> A device for recovering seals when shot near the edge of the ice. It consists of a wooden ball the size of a grape-fruit, to which several fish-hooks are bound, attached to a line about fifty yards in length. The retriever is swung round the head and then thrown over the floating seal; as it is dragged back, one of the hooks will catch in its skin.

## WINTER MONTHS

inches apart. The newest ice is black and glassy smooth. A hard blow sends the ice-spear through at once. One soon gets to rely implicitly on the ice-spear, and every single step must be tested in danger zones: if the spear goes through with its own weight the ice is definitely unsafe; if a little force is needed to push it through it is safe for skis; with a little more effort it is safe if one trots and does not stop—and so on. I cut a hole and found that we could just go over sea-ice that is barely four inches thick, while five inches is quite safe. Stefansson gives greater thicknesses, but that is for more salty water. The really dangerous places are where long dark splinters show among grey ice. Where layers of thin ice have been forced over each other by pressure, the ice piles up in white and irregular lines: this ice is naturally thicker and less slippery. New ice has a bloom on it like clouded glass: footmarks remove the bloom so that if one gets the light right one can follow another hunter or one's own tracks home again. As Enock walked I could see the ice giving beneath *every* step. Further out we could hear the resonant, throbbing noise of the sea grinding the pack together; the crest of each wave could easily be followed as it swayed the new ice up and down. I felt most unsafe, as I weigh several stone more than Enock, but he only thought it rather funny. There were lovely frost flowers forming on the new ice.

A white circle two feet across with a few fragments of broken ice on top showed where a bearded seal had bumped his head through the ice for air. There was a smaller hole in the middle about three inches wide which had not frozen over again. A fjord seal makes a much smaller dent. I found a small pool of open water which had obviously been kept open by something. I waited for some time and at last a huge bearded seal came up to breathe. I took very careful aim with my telescopic sight and was amazed when the seal went down unhurt.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

I missed two more seals later on, so tested the rifle—with surprising results. Apparently with a rifle-rest,<sup>1</sup> on this very slippery ice, the bullet goes as much as four inches too high in a hundred yards. I tried it with the rest on a patch of rough snow and found it dead accurate. Enock said the Eskimos know this, and always put a nail point downwards on each runner of the rifle-rest, so that it will not slide. Why the devil couldn't he tell me before? Where the ice was a little thicker we found the breathing holes of a number of fjord seals. From a distance one could see a low pyramid of ice—or rather frozen seal-breath, a foot across and a few inches high. A hole often less than an inch in diameter showed the black open water a few inches below. As the seal may have several breathing holes and can always move off and get air at the tide crack, or beside a floe which is frozen in, he will not return if he has heard you. The Eskimos have learned a trick from the bears: they go up to a breathing hole, and leaving one man there, the rest walk away so that the seal thinks everyone has departed. We tried this. Though I heard a distinct scratching noise I saw no sign of the seal. When the ice is very thick the seal keeps open a vertical cigar-shaped depression for his body, and one can then shoot straight down; but if the ice is thin, as it is here, he comes up horizontally and one must wait to see his nose at the hole before one can make out on which side of the breathing hole to shoot. In the old days the hunters used to harpoon seals at the breathing holes; the Angmagssalik Eskimos never do that now. Out at the mouth of the fjord we saw the sun to-day, the first time since November 6th. I wasn't as thrilled as I expected to be. While I was waiting beside the breathing hole Enock found a bear track further out and was very

<sup>1</sup> These Eskimo rifle-rests, which we usually used, are the same small sledge-like contrivances used to hold the screen and rifle when stalking seals lying out on the ice.

## WINTER MONTHS

excited. He says we will get lots of bears now the pack-ice is beginning to freeze together. . . .

Out at the edge of the ice there were many tracks of Arctic foxes. Before the snow came we had seen no evidence of their presence, but we realised now that there must be half a dozen or so in our fjord alone. In the summer they can catch birds and fish, and in the spring, when they can follow the Polar bears out on the pack and finish off the remains of the seals the bears have caught, they can get enough to eat; but in the early winter, while land and fore-shore are covered deep in snow, and before they can venture out on the pack, they must find it very hard to get any food. Perhaps this accounts for their unusual fearlessness at this time. One day at the end of November, Rymill was testing the newly formed fjord-ice, when he suddenly saw the dog, Salo, rushing excitedly round a fox out on the ice only a few hundred yards in front of the Base. The fox was dodging about, finding the new ice very slippery, but eventually he crossed the fjord and hid among some grounded floes by the river mouth. Salo was apparently merely curious and made no attempt to catch the fox. The other dogs, including Joe and Bill, looked on with pricked ears but did not try to join in. Another day we were returning from shark fishing when we saw a fox sitting by one of my fox traps, eating some bits of blubber which had been left in the snow. He lolloped off, hardly sinking at all into the deep snow which prevented us pursuing. This fox had silvery white fur and a very large brush, which he held drooping behind him. He would stop every now and then and sit up in the snow, watching us. Sometimes in January, coming suddenly out of the hut at dawn, we would surprise a fox scavenging on our rubbish heap, while the dogs lay curled up and asleep, taking no notice whatsoever.

Box traps, which catch foxes alive, were not much use, because they continually filled with snow; the dogs, too, discovered them and would set them off in their efforts to

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

steal the blubber bait. The natives use a simple deadfall trap which is fairly successful. At Nigertusok, during the winter, they trapped sixteen foxes, two of which were blue ones.

The first fox we caught only weighed 7 lbs., though it was full grown. It was a very beautiful animal with rounded ears, a black nose and lovely amber-coloured eyes. In the brush, which was almost as thick as the body, the grey-blue fur of summer could still be seen beneath the long silvery-white hair of winter. The stomach contained some dog droppings and a few guillemot bones. Apparently the foxes can catch these birds in the occasional pools of open water, which are sometimes kept open by the motion of ice-bergs or by an exceptionally strong current. I have seen a slight depression in the snow on the edge of one of these pools, where a fox must have crouched for hours waiting for the bird to come within reach. We found that fox meat was as tender as chicken, but in spite of much boiling it was quite impossible to get rid of the strong characteristic foxy flavour. The Eskimos, most conservative of people, will never touch fox or dog meat if they can help it.

In December, during which month there were only nine days without snow, it was impossible to do much sledging, as the dogs would flounder about belly deep through snow in which we ourselves sank up to our waists. No sooner did we make a good hard track to the fishing-nets, or to the shark holes, than a new fall of snow would obliterate it. We used the broad-runner Nansen sledges for these journeys and drove the dogs in the way they were used to, in a fan with traces of unequal length. In this way each dog is on his own trace, but the length of these may be so arranged that in deep snow the dogs on shorter traces can walk in the tracks of those in front. Unfortunately, to drive at all was not very easy with our motley collection of dogs—most of whom had not been brought up as a family and consequently loathed the sight of each other. My team consisted of six

dogs: Red Fox, Henson and Slope, three excellent dogs who had been driven together for two seasons by the schoolmaster at Angmagssalik. They were red and white, black and white, and cream coloured respectively, and therefore probably not brothers; but they were quite inseparable, and violently attacked any dog which came near the bit of ground (near our coal heap) which they had appropriated as their own territory. Salo and Carnera were the strongest dogs of my team, and as these two simply hated the other three they would invariably run out at  $45^{\circ}$  to one side, while the schoolmaster's three would only pull at  $45^{\circ}$  on the other side. My remaining dog, one Toomah, a nervous, one-eyed dog with a very independent spirit, was so afraid of both the other groups that he at first refused to pull at all, except backwards in the opposite direction to that in which I was attempting to travel. So frightened was Toomah that when we stopped he would retreat to the limit of his trace, and then howl and yelp with fear till my back was turned; then he would bite his trace, or slip out of his harness if he got the chance, and rush back home. Ideally, of course, one drives a team of dogs which have all been brought up together. But if a scratch team is unavoidable it is probably better to have each dog from a different family, otherwise groups of three or four will combine and refuse to mix with the others. Single dogs on the other hand will more readily make friends. A Dane at Jakobshavn told me that he overcame this difficulty by shutting up each dog in turn with the king dog, so that when they were all together again every dog admitted his leadership.

On the 1930-31 Expedition, Watkins and Scott, the only two who had previously driven dogs, had gained their experience in Labrador, where owing to the wooded nature of the country the centre trace method of driving, in which the dogs are harnessed singly or in pairs on a long single trace, is the only possible one. Certainly compared with the Eskimo dog-driving we saw at Angmagssalik the centre-trace method

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

was preferable, except among crevasses and on dangerous ice; and by the end of that expedition I was strongly in favour of the single trace. It was especially good with heavy loads in deep snow, for then the dogs behind could pull in the tracks of those in front, and if the snow was very deep a man could walk ahead on snow-shoes or skis. The greater the angle between the dog's trace and the axis of the sledge the less efficient is the pull; and here single trace is much more efficient, because in the fan trace method the outermost dogs will be pulling at a wide angle out to the side, especially when the traces become tangled. The chief difficulty of teaching the centre-trace method to teams used to the fan is that when the dogs at the back see the whip passing over their heads they will instinctively cower, because when you drive in fan you habitually flick your whip over the head of any dog that will not lie down when the order to stop is given.

Since driving with the Danes and Greenlanders at Jakobshavn in Disco Bay, on the West Coast, I am much less biased in favour of the centre-trace method. I think it should be possible to train young dogs to pull in either formation, and on the 1930-31 Expedition all our dogs,<sup>1</sup> and many of them were old ones, had to learn the centre-trace method. But we were then driving with heavy loads—100 lb. to each dog—on the Ice Cap, and the usual difficulty of finding competent leaders was minimised because we commonly travelled with at least two sledges. The teams at the back would then always follow the one in front, and if necessary a man would walk ahead to encourage them.

At Jakobshavn they drive teams of eight or nine dogs on traces all exactly of the same length (about 14 feet) attached to a long leading trace (a V-shaped thong permanently fixed to the sledge). A journey that I did at Jakobshavn certainly opened my eyes to the possibilities of driving with a team of dogs that have been brought up together and always trained and driven by the same man. The team were waiting out-

<sup>1</sup> These dogs came from the Jakobshavn district.

side the house, not with one forepaw tucked into the harness, as at Angmagssalik, to stop the dogs running away—that was unnecessary. They waited for the word of command and then started off. The dogs—nine of them, including a bitch—were all side by side and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. Every now and then one dog would turn and lick the muzzle of the dogs on either side. Admittedly they dodged about a certain amount, but the king dog and the next strongest took up their positions on each side of the bitch and stayed there. Only the two flanking dogs tried to change their position. The dogs kept up a fast trot; they were not encouraged to gallop, as that is inclined to wear a dog out. At Jakobshavn the good drivers use a dog till he is seven or eight; indeed I saw one dog of thirteen who was still being driven, and his owner assured me that he was the best dog uphill. Another driver, who had five seven-year-olds and four dogs of about eight months, told me that on a long journey the young ones pulled as hard as they could all the morning, while the older ones reserved their strength and would work best at the end of the day.

What interested me most was the way we descended steep hills, and the ingenious manner of crossing leads in the ice. When we came to a hill the driver whistled to his dogs, who at once slowed down and at the same time divided, so that half the team went to each side of the sledge, which then ran over the traces and got in front of the dogs. On the descent we steadied the sledge a little with our feet, but most of the braking was done by the dogs. At the bottom we had to stop for a moment to lift the back of the sledge over the traces—and then away again. On a steeper hill the driver ran behind the sledge, pulling back on the handle-bars and letting his feet drag in the snow beneath the sledge. When we came to a rocky place, to avoid the traces getting cut by the runners, we stopped at the top of the hill and put the traces right back over the handle-bars. Then the dogs ran down the hill behind the sledge.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

But it was crossing the leads that interested me most. As we approached a lead about six feet wide, at a steady trot, the driver leant forward and pulled in the leading trace and then the other traces so that the sledge approached nearer the dogs. When the team reached the lead and were all in a line on the edge of the ice he let go of the leading trace and the dogs all jumped across together, and reaching the other side pulled the sledge after them. Sitting well to the back of the sledge we did not get wet. If a wide lead is encountered the team is stopped on the edge, the sledge is pulled right up to the edge of the water, and then the dogs leap across.

At Egedesminde, where they drive more on the sea-ice than on land, I noticed that the leading trace was longer than at Jakobshavn. And at Upernivik, where they drive only on the sea-ice, I am told that the apex of the leading trace may be as much as six feet in front of the sledge and has a cross strap half-way along to facilitate pulling it in. The traces at Upernivik are sometimes more than twenty feet long, so that leads as much as six or seven yards wide can be crossed in the way described above. Crevasses, up to a certain width, varying as the length of the sledge, can be negotiated in the same way; whereas with a centre trace, or the Angmagssalik way of driving dogs with traces of differing lengths, the dogs would be unable to get a clear jump and would be far more likely to do down. With traces of the same length, if one or two dogs fall down a crevasse or go through the ice they will be pulled out by the impetus of the sledge.

I am certain that it cheers up the dogs to have a bitch running with them, though on a long trip this becomes almost impracticable. But the great thing, especially on a long journey through country as monotonous as the interior of Greenland, is to keep the dogs happy and cheerful.

The East Coast Eskimos are bad dog-drivers and do not exact much obedience from their teams. They steer mostly by whip and take it as a matter of course if the team refuses

## WINTER MONTHS

to stop when told to. We used the Angmagssalik words of command which the dogs were supposed to understand: Kar ! Kar ! to start them off ; a shrill Iu ! Iu ! Iu ! to go to the left ; a very high-pitched Ille, ille, ille ! to go to the right, and a deep, nasal Ai ! to make them stop.

This matter of stopping is the crucial point in training Huskies. Out on the slippery sea-ice, once a team of strong dogs decides it will go home, it is almost impossible to stop it ; and once a dog finds he can take control he will make the most of it. The great thing is to be consistent: then the dogs learn that a certain sound always means the same thing, and that if they disobey, punishment will surely follow. Rymill and I would spend hours training our teams, taking them back again and again if they refused to stop.

To be a good dog-driver it is essential to be really accurate with the whip, so that one can hit the offending dog, and hit him hard. But with a well-trained team it is hardly necessary to use the whip at all, and all commands can be given without shouting. As the Angmagssalik Eskimos drive small teams and rarely have the leading dogs far in front of them, they use very light seal-skin whips, which they wield much as a fisherman casts a fly, but pulling it back rapidly after each stroke. As we usually sledged with heavy loads, we would walk behind our sledges on skis, steadyng ourselves by holding on to one handle-bar of the sledge; we were, therefore, separated from our dogs not only by the much longer traces we used, but by the whole length of a Nansen sledge (about 12 feet). Consequently we had to use much heavier twenty-foot whips, or if driving in single trace, even thirty-foot whips. Rymill, being an Australian, was an expert with these, but I had to spend hours practising before I could use the heavy bullock and kangaroo-hide whips which he had had especially made in Australia.

The Alsatians did not take kindly to sledging. Joe would trot jauntily along at first, then he would stop and

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

immediately get bowled over by the sledge and eventually be dragged along in the snow by his harness. We had quite enough to do training our Huskies without bothering about Joe and Bill. Alas! neither of them survived the winter; they never learned the art of curling up in the snow. I think, perhaps, their meagre coats did not prevent the heat of their bodies thawing the snow into pools of water, which, when the temperature fell, would freeze again, together with lumps of their fur. Oddly enough, dogs with exceptionally long fur also get frozen down in the same way, but it is only the ends of the hairs that are held. In this way Bill developed a running sore in his hindquarters which became so serious that we had to shoot him. Joe had a pernicious lump in his side, then got thinner and more miserable, till he died, we think of pleurisy, one day in January. There were other casualties among the dogs: Carnera was bitten so badly in the paw that he could not be driven for a month or two, one dog had a sprained foot, another a poisoned toe; then one morning we found that all the dogs had set upon one of Rymill's best dogs and bitten it to death. They had not attempted to eat it and were getting plenty of work and food at that time. This had never happened on the last expedition, even with sixty dogs, and we were very surprised. The next day they tried to kill the deceased dog's brother: I ran outside, hearing a strange noise, and found every dog in the place tearing at this unfortunate animal, who was on his back fighting for his life. After that we always kept one or two of the fiercer dogs tied up.

The problem of dog-food soon became rather acute, as the shark-fishing in our fjord failed and for a month or two we had to eke out our supply of seal-meat and blubber with dog biscuits, which at first the Huskies refused to eat. However, after Christmas the Eskimos caught so many sharks in their fjord that we could sledge over and bring back as much as we wanted.

The method of catching these sharks was different from the most primitive method we had learnt on the last expedition, when we harpooned the sharks in carefully prepared holes in the ice as they came to the surface at night. Enock made us cut a hole about two feet across in the ice, and then drop through lumps of blubber attached to stones. Stale bearded-seal blubber is best as it has a stronger smell, and being much tougher is less easily pulled off the stones. A huge metal hook, eighteen inches in length, was next baited with blubber and attached to a yard or two of strong wire or chain weighted with lead, and then let down through the hole so that it was just clear of the bottom. The depth of this kind of fishing was regulated by the amount of line one had; usually we would fish in about thirty fathoms. The line would be hooked over a stick, so placed that it would tremble when the bait was touched, and then we would wait. After several days' fishing we only caught two small sharks, about six or eight feet long, in Lake Fjord; but at Nigertusok we sometimes got a dozen in a day, the largest being fifteen feet in length. These sharks (*microcephalus somniosis*) are quite harmless, and would only bite anything actually put into their mouths. To kill them Enock cut a saucer-shaped depression in the top of the head and extracted the long white spinal cord, which he proceeded to crack like a whip. Some of the sharks had large red lice as much as an inch in length. The stomachs (considered by the dogs the most appetising part) contained remains of cod, halibut, red fish and a kind of skate. The sharks must become much more lively in deep water to enable them to catch such prey as this. Shark meat contains some sort of poison which, till the dogs are used to it, makes them quite drunk and sleepy. This poison seems to disappear if the meat is kept for some time. When fed with blubber it is a tolerably good dog-food, though it is too heavy to be taken on sledge journeys. The Eskimos hang lumps of the shark meat, which is glutinous and tasteless when fresh, in the warmth of their winter

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

houses; then, after a few weeks, when it is really ripe, they consider it a delicacy. They also eat it fresh after boiling it and throwing away the water three or four times.

When the seal-hunting finished at Nigertusok the Eskimos had little else to do except to come over and have a look at us. We were delighted to see them at first, but when we had, almost daily, visitors who usually stayed for several nights, we got rather tired of it, especially as we were short of food, and had to ask Enock to regulate the visits of his family. Weedy mena and Leah would sometimes come over with Enock and sew for us, or scrub the floor, wash clothes or do anything else they could to help. All they wanted by way of reward was some tobacco, especially the "dottle" from our pipes. We used to keep this in a special tin for them, so that they could chew it together with cigar-ends when they felt the need of a stimulant. They are so used to working that they really dislike sitting idle, and would implore us to give them jobs to do, as their arms were aching for lack of work.

Eskimos are unusually supple about the hips, and when the women are washing clothes or dishes they put the basin on the floor and stand beside it, bending down with rigid knees, to do the work. There is a story that a Danish housewife saw her Eskimo servant in this unusual position, and taking pity on her handed her a stool on which she could stand the basin. A few minutes later she saw the girl standing on the stool, and still using the basin on the floor.

Enock himself was quite the finest Eskimo we had met on the East Coast. To look at he was small, even for an Eskimo, and very ugly. He had a cast in one eye, and had broken his nose with his dog-whip a year or two before. When a small boy he had been set upon and severely mauled by a fierce dog—this, too, had left its mark on his battered face. Like most Eskimos he was bow-legged and a most ungainly walker. The Angmagssalik Eskimos spend so much of their time in their kayaks that their legs are definitely under-

developed. Enock's feet were most curiously deformed from the confinement of his exceedingly low kayak: from pressing against the top of it, the toes of his right foot were all turned outwards at least  $30^{\circ}$  from the straight.

Enock would stand no nonsense from Rymill or me when we were out hunting together: if we missed a seal we would not be allowed to forget it; things must be done in the traditional way or not at all. Enock had none of the servile ways so common among many of the hunters we had met. He had also a wonderful sense of humour and would keep us amused for hours on end recounting, with brilliant pantomime, the old tales, and showing us the games the Eskimos used to play before the Europeans came.

In spite of Christianity the drum-dancing means much more to the Eskimos than one would at first imagine. Some of the younger hunters take little interest in these songs and tales, but many of the older men can go on beating the drum and singing hour after hour without ever repeating themselves. Enock told us that when he and Narda and Yelmar of Sermiligak were wintering further north, at Nualik, in bad weather they would go on drum-dancing for a day and a night, with pauses only for meals.

We had a striking proof one day of the way the old beliefs survive. There frequently occurs, in Eskimo stories, a sinister creature called a *tupilak* (pronounced "tubida" at Angmagssalik). It is an avenging spirit, composed of various parts of man and different animals. When the maker has given life to it, he sends it out to destroy those who have offended him. The very sight of it is enough to cause death. If the victim is a stronger magician, however, the *tupilak* will return to its maker and devour him. Nikolay came over one morning and told us that at dawn the day before he had just been the round of his fox traps and was returning to the winter-house when he saw a bear, quite near, on the sea-ice. He shouted to the others, who came running out, and he even shot several times at the bear, who

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

made off at a great pace across the ice. When, however, they ran down to set the dogs on the track they found that the footmarks were those of a fox. While this story was being told, Enock, Weedy mena and Leah, who were staying with us at the time, listened with breathless interest, and the women both dropped their sewing at the critical part of the story. I do not suggest for a moment that any of them thought that the explanation was anything else than the strangely magnifying effect of diffused light, but even then their excitement was palpable.

However, soon they really did get a bear. Enock, Rymill and I had just returned from shark-fishing one day in mid-January, when we saw that all the rest of the natives had come over from the next fjord. At nightfall, suddenly all the dogs had started making the special yapping noise they make when they scent or see a bear. The natives all rushed out into the snow and saw a bear standing by the shark hole, which was a few hundred yards out on the fjord. They followed the tracks of the bear, which had run off as soon as the men appeared, till they came on to ice which was dangerously thin. As it was dark by then they gave up the chase and waited for morning. As soon as it was light they sledged out and soon saw the bear, who, being apparently very hungry, had returned again to the good things lying around the shark hole. It was a very slow bear and they caught it up and shot it without the aid of the dogs. The Eskimos were so pleased about this, the first bear of the year, that they had brought about half the meat with them as a present for us.

A few days later I found that a bear had visited one of my fox traps: he had picked it up, wrenched the lid off and hurled the trap down, for the whole thing was crushed. Many small tooth-marks on the stick which held the bait showed that there had been a fox inside, but whether the bear had caught the fox or not it was impossible to tell. Recent snow obscured all smaller tracks, though the huge

## WINTER MONTHS

footmarks of the bear, more than a foot in diameter, still showed clearly. As the tracks came from the fjord mouth it looked as if the pack-ice had at last frozen firmly on to the land.

During the winter I was very unhappy about my knee. Every time I took any exercise at all, water collected, and the knee made strange noises inside the joint. I lay up all December, when almost continuous falling or drifting snow made it pretty unpleasant to go outside in any case. This naturally had a somewhat depressing effect upon me, as it certainly looked as if I should not be able to take part in any of the journeys we had planned. I felt that something was permanently wrong with the knee, and that I would probably not be able to do anything energetic for the rest of my life. Although the other two were wonderfully tactful and helpful, the thought that I should be a passenger while they did all the work got on my mind.

The moment the weather and sledging conditions should allow we had hoped to go to Angmagssalik, chiefly to buy more dogs. Subsequently we planned to do a series of sledge journeys to map the mountainous country between our Base and the Ice Cap. If the pack-ice sledging were really good we thought we might go straight up to Kangerdlugsuak on the sea-ice, and then return inland mapping the mountains. There was a large depot of man and dog food at the head of Kangerdlugsuatsiak, which we had left there when we entered the fjord in the *Quest* in 1930. Watkins had wired to Mikkelsen to ask him to look at this depot when he was there with the *Sokongen* in September and to mark it, but as Mikkelsen had not been able to reach the depot, we had no idea if it was still in good order and therefore could not rely upon it. Thus it would only be possible to attempt to reach Kangerdlugsuak if the pack-ice provided such a good sledging surface that we could take enough provisions for a return journey lasting perhaps six or seven weeks.

In the beginning of December, Rymill and Riley went up

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

to the lake and measured a base line there for the local triangulation. Sledging conditions were then extremely bad, as the snow refused to settle, while the visibility prevented serious survey work. However, about Christmas time the temperature suddenly went up to 37° F. and heavy rain fell. This, at last, packed down the snow, and when it froze again there was a splendid sledging surface. Taking advantage of the improved conditions, on December 29th Rymill and Riley set off for what was intended to be a ten-days' trip to find a way up the glacier at the head of Jordan Valley and to penetrate as far inland as possible.

I would meanwhile rest my knee so as to prepare it for the journey to Angmagssalik, and keep the meteorological work going till Riley returned. As soon as they had gone, it started once more to snow and drift. On December 31st they returned. They had not even seen the glacier they were trying to ascend, and they thought they might just as well lie up in the Base as in a cramped and uncomfortable tent.

The success of our Christmas celebrations was marred by one misfortune. A few days before this great day arrived we brought our tinned turkey down from the loft and put it on the shelf above the stove to thaw out. About the same time a penetrating but elusive smell filled the hut, though we did not connect this with the turkey. On Christmas Eve, Riley started to open this tin. I was working in the porch at the time and Rymill was up in the loft. As Riley stuck the tin-opener into the tin there was a loud hissing noise and a jet of brownish liquid squirted up to the ceiling accompanied by a cloud of nauseating gas; the smell was beyond description. Riley rushed wildly out of the house, like a dog that has been stung on the nose by a wasp, and Rymill had to leave the loft. It took us days to get rid of that smell. And every time we threw the tin into the sea the dogs, considering this a special delicacy, recovered it at low water and brought it back to the front door.

Throughout January the bad weather continued, and by

the end of the month twelve feet of snow lay outside the hut. The Stevenson screen had to be put on the roof of the porch as it was impossible to keep on digging it out of a snowdrift, but even in its new position it would sometimes be found full of snow in the morning. We had to keep tunnels open to the coal and to the stream from which we got our water supply. When the periodic thaws and rain came, careful draining was necessary to prevent the water flowing in at the door. The snow-level was well above the eaves of the hut and we had to keep a space dug out in front of the door. Sometimes in the morning on opening the outer door (all doors in snowy countries must open inwards) the drift would have completely filled the doorway with close-packed snow like a sheet stretched tightly across. The cold from the outside froze the moisture which condensed on the window panes, so that throughout the winter it was impossible to see through the windows, and in dull weather so little light came through that artificial light would be needed throughout the day. Although the hut seemed warm enough, it was usually freezing down by the floor. Water would condense on the walls and, running down, turn into ice as it got near the floor. This was most annoying, as several inches of ice would sometimes have to be hacked away before the door could be opened.

One night I slept so far up in my bunk that my head touched the wall. Next morning when I tried to sit up I found my hair was frozen solidly to the wall of the hut (I must admit that my hair was rather long—in fact I had not had it cut since leaving Copenhagen). But on the whole we passed a very happy winter. Sometimes when getting time signals by wireless (our long-wave sledging sets would not pick up any broadcasting) we would hear ships talking to each other in Morse, but otherwise we had no connection with the outside world. One could read happily eight or nine hours a day with a clear conscience; there was absolutely nothing else to be done.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

At the beginning of February the weather at last improved. We sledged out to Ailsa and from the top of the island saw the firm pack-ice stretching as far as eye could see. With zero temperature and high cloudless skies, it seemed as if we could at last set off for Angmagssalik. My knee was more or less all right, and it seemed better to try it out on a trip on which we should never be very far from settlements, than on a major survey journey. On February 6th we left Enock's settlement and the next day found us *en route* for Angmagssalik.

*And from my heart I bless the fate that allowed me to be born at a time when Arctic exploration by dog sledge was not yet a thing of the past. In this sudden retrospect . . . indeed, I bless the whole journey, forgetting hardship and chance misfortune by the way, in the exultation I feel in the successful conclusion of a high adventure !*

KNUD RASMUSSEN

## CHAPTER VIII

### A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

TAKING advantage of the fine cold weather at the beginning of February, we started for Angmagssalik without delay. The chief object of this journey was to buy more dogs, without which we would be quite unable to do any of the survey journeys we had planned. The account of this journey I take from my diary.

*February 5th.* Pleasantly peaceful day packing up. I always panic in a case like this, rushing wildly round doing nothing. Everything ready now, sledges overhauled, food-boxes packed, clothes and gear all in order. Marvellous day. Though the temperature was below zero, I spent almost an hour hatless and gloveless in the moonlight, lashing on my handle-bars: I wasn't cold, because there isn't a breath of wind. Farewell feast of tinned halibut and fruit salad; it's sad how little we can eat even when we try!

*February 6th.* Hurray! Off at last. Said good-bye to Quintin: I don't suppose he'll be alone much as Enoch and Weedy mena are coming over. I ride my sledge to save my knee; luckily my team is much faster and stronger, especially since John's best dog was killed: he has only five now and two of them are weaklings. Nothing in fishing-net or fox-trap. Five feet of ice on the lake now and a foot of new ice over the holes, so it's a job to get the net out: the natives usually put some snow over the holes, but it doesn't make much difference—probably an old superstition. Coming over the hill beyond the lake all my dogs suddenly started pulling like hell with ears up, all straining at the traces. I have often noticed teams do this. It's most uncanny. I wonder if they see a ghost,

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

or get a sudden whiff of bear scent? Reached Enock's settlement to find everybody well. They lost our shark hook to-day in a large shark, but they have caught quite a number. Enock and Kidarsi have been bear-hunting a lot out in the pack and all their dogs' legs are skinned at the back from one to five inches above the heel: this is from breaking through the snow crust. I rushed out in the night, barefooted and almost naked, to stop John's dogs fighting; it was  $-12^{\circ}$  F., but I didn't feel cold.

*February 7th.* Up at 5.0, away at 8.0. We tried to cut overland from the south-west corner of Nigertusok Fjord to the branch fjord to the north of Kangerdlugsuatsiak. There is a traditional Eskimo route here, but Enock doesn't know where it runs nor if it is possible for loaded sledges. We wanted to map the country between the head of Kangerdlugsuatsiak and Sermilik Fjord on our way. Enock and Kidarsi are coming too as they want to take advantage of our tent to have a day's bear-hunting in Kangerdlugsuatsiak. With their light sledges they went ahead to make a track. Wonderful morning,  $-13^{\circ}$  F. but sunny and tranquil. I wear a pair of socks and stockings, two blanket shoes and the best pattern of seal-skin boot, which has the fur on the outside and ties just below the knee, so no snow can get in. They are so watertight that one can wade in them, but on the other hand sweat cannot escape, so to collect the moisture it was most important to wear plenty of grass in these boots. Then I wear camel-hair underclothes, a flannel shirt and two sweaters, corduroy trousers and a light windproof coat, woollen inner mits and a pair of seal-skin outer mits with an edging of dog-fur. This fur is very useful to thaw out one's nose and face when they get frost-bitten. I also carry a seal-skin anorak with a fox-fur edging to the hood. This is for really cold weather and for riding on the sledge. I have had a zip fastener put down the front.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

which makes it wonderfully convenient and saves the awful job of pulling it on over one's head.

Leaving the fjord, we went up and up on land, with snow getting deeper and softer. Our heavily loaded wide-runner Nansen sledges would side-slip on the least traverse and slip off the track made by the dogs into the deeper snow alongside. We had to keep below our sledges and support them. We ought to have adjustable plates on the sides of the runners like Bilgeri ski crampons. After much toil we reached a valley where further progress was stopped by a vertical rock wall, several hundred feet high; we can't get this way and must return and go round by the sea-ice to-morrow. It took seven hours up and two and a half back in our tracks downhill. We came down one very steep place so fast that we both overturned at the bottom, in spite of chain drags. Returned by moonlight to the settlement. Enock's little dogs go very well, but I don't think they could manage much of a load. Many of the hunters here have the curious custom of clipping the dogs' ears and even docking their tails. Some of Enock's are so mutilated. With these teams and such going we can't go by the glacier to Angmagssalik, so we will have to dump all the survey gear and half our supplies here and go down entirely on the sea-ice, returning the same way with ten dogs apiece. Then we can start mapping at once.

*February 8th.* Another heavenly day, though clouds to the north. Brilliant sunshine, deep blue skies and a dazzling white landscape. Wrote our change of plans to Quintin, re-sorted our gear and set off at 9.0 with only about 250 lb. on each sledge. Enock and Kidarsi are coming as far as they can without having to spend a night out. I can't understand why the natives here never go and camp: they won't do anything untraditional. Good going down their fjord, but we soon got into thick pack. Here it is all hummocky and uneven. One must pick a

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

way most carefully through a switchback of lumps of ice about the height of a man. Luckily most of the irregularities have been smoothed out by the snow, but we were continually leaping from side to side of the sledges to prevent them overturning, easing them down vertical drops of four to five feet, lifting the bows up on to the next floe, and so on. Our sledges went over often. Mine is three inches lower than John's, so it is less top-heavy, but the cross-bars catch on any obstruction and the front digs in when it gets the chance and stops the sledge with a jerk. You really want two men to each sledge, one to hold the handle-bars and steer the sledge and the other to look after the front and stop it overturning. Both points broke off the runners of Kidarsi's sledge, so they stopped to repair it while we went on. It was terribly hot at midday and any snow on a dark surface would melt at once in the sun. The tide-crack oozes up water and makes awe-inspiring noises: a sudden sharp crack like a stone hitting an empty bucket, then regular explosive noises reminiscent of a gas engine, and a drawn-out whizzing, whining noise like a separator starting. There must be terrific pressure. Bear and fox tracks follow the tide-crack; saw a pair of ravens.

After passing Hell Corner we found some stretches of level dark ice which must quite recently have been open water. There were several large bergs frozen in here. From the top of one of these we saw that there was rough going right across Kangerdlugsuatsiak and that the pack stretched as far as could be seen out to sea. We tried to continue by moonlight, but it proved impossible to pick the best way, so we camped in the centre of a level floe. The dogs don't seem very tired; fed them on dried salmon—an ideal food for short journeys, light and nourishing, but rather too bulky. John got so hot and out of breath that all his face, hair and clothes were beautifully coated with white rime. My knee feels as if someone

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

had been hitting it with a hammer; it is very swollen too, but still works all right, though noisily. John uncomplainingly does all the hard work and in such a tactful, unobtrusive way. Porridge with raisins in it for supper. To our horror we find that the tin of paraffin which was at the bottom of my sledge has been punctured by a sharp bit of ice and every drop has leaked away. This is the worst thing that could happen. As we have only half a Primus full to last us to Angmagssalik, we can only spare enough to melt snow for drink, nor can we properly dry out our clothes which are very wet from hard work.

*February 9th.* Cold in the night, especially round the shoulders. Up 5.30, melted water to drink, munch and chocolate for breakfast, out before 7.0. Cloudy and desolate-looking. Watery crimson sunrise out to sea, making rather a fine silhouette of the distant pack-ice; clouds down on hills. Dogs had not stirred from their positions, except Salo who had slipped his harness. Away 8.30. A few level stretches of freshly frozen leads, but otherwise mile after mile of appalling going, with checks and overturns all the time. Both our teams are absolutely obedient now, so we can make them follow the route we choose even though it means continually turning and twisting.

At last got across the fjord and found some fresh black ice near the shore, only just safe and very fast, passed several seal breathing-holes here; I believe the long-harpoon could be used for hunting when travelling on the pack. Innumerable bear and fox tracks, all very fresh; one of a baby bear with pads no bigger than my fist. Enock says bears hunt in twos or threes, then when they find a breathing-hole one stays behind, while the others walk away. When the seal, thinking they have all gone, comes up to breathe, the bear brings its paw down with gargantuan force and smashes the seal's skull and the surrounding ice into fragments. Enock has twice seen

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

this happen. Bears cannot kill walrus like this, as their skulls are too thick. Several Eskimos in different settlements have told me how a man once watched a bear kill a walrus that was lying out on the ice. The bear collected a large chunk of ice, and then stalking up to the walrus lifted the ice above its head and brought it down for all it was worth on the walrus's skull, which was cracked right across.

We found some freshly picked seal-bones and a network of tracks on an ice hummock. Some of our dogs got wildly excited and wanted to follow the tracks. We soon got level going in behind Sartermie with no pack-ice, just flat bay-ice with a foot of soft snow. Sky cleared more or less, but clouds racing up from the south. The sun shone fitfully when we stopped for munch and chocolate at 12.0. I rode most of the way, but got so cold that I started hopping behind my sledge and holding on to my handle-bars. Both teams going jolly well. There are colossally steep mountains here with great avalanche tracks down them. There is supposed to be a short cut somewhere here over a gap into another fjord, but we weren't sure where and the map is only a caricature. We met rough pack-ice again before we left the channel, with much deeper snow, so that the last hour was terribly hard work; almost pushing the sledges along. Dogs very tired, especially John's team, which will hardly start. Camped in rather an unsatisfactory place just before the island. Not enough fuel to cook a meal, especially as the weather looks bad and it is starting to snow, so we may be here some time. In the afternoon we saw rather a good mock sun, and looking at it we could discern snow crystals in the air. Luckily we brought a loaf or two of bread with us, and though it is frozen like rock we can thaw it out in our sleeping bags overnight. Too cold and miserable to read, so went to sleep at 8.0.

*February 10th.* Woke at 5.0 to hear drifting snow

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

hurtling against the tent and then a most disquieting rending noise like thunder, accompanied by a quivering of the ice. I sat up as the tent shook again; "John," I shouted, "it's blowing like hell and the ice is breaking up!" Just then there was another muffled shock. John sat up sleepily, "But it can't be," he answered, "we haven't had breakfast yet." And he was quite right. Looking out of the tent we saw that we had camped only a few hundred yards from a steep cliff, and with the rising wind, masses of snow were avalanching straight down on to the sea-ice. John went out to see if it was fit to travel, while I made a very efficient stove out of a tobacco tin and a bit of plaited cord. It burns meth, of which we have a whole bottle. John was away two hours and I was afraid a bear had got him, or he had gone through the ice. When he returned he said the snow was fearfully deep and the visibility poor. Ate munch and chocolate. Warm now with the stove, and clothes are drying. It's a good life—too good really; one can't go on for ever, and it merely spoils one for settling down to any other job. Dog's legs and feet were cut very much yesterday. The sticky snow on the ice balls up between their toes more than snow on land, while the crust skins the back of their legs. We had a scare when we suddenly heard heavy footfalls crunching outside. I got my pistol ready while John gingerly opened the tent door. It sounded just like a bear, but was only Salo wandering about, having slipped his harness. These seal-skin boots are ideal, because you can slip them on at a moment's notice, if the ice breaks up, or to rush out and stop a dog-fight. The tent ground-sheet ought to be 18 inches bigger each way so that it can curl over and stop the sleeping-bag touching the tent wall. This deep snow is hell. Hope we get good ice to Sermiligak. Blew and snowed all night. Very warm and comfortable. I read aloud to John about Prince Florizel and the Suicide Club. You want a well

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

written, exciting story for a sledge trip; Stevenson is ideal, then Conan Doyle and Dumas. You also want something more solid for lying-up days—Scott, Thackeray or the Brontës.

*February 11th.* Lovely morning, but snow still drifting like fire-smoke in the morning sunshine. Two feet of new snow lying. Dogs can do nothing with these loads and we have to wear skis, otherwise we go in often waist-deep, but it's almost impossible to control the sledges on skis. John has to do all the work. He skis ahead to make a track, then drives his team along. I follow taking half his load as well as mine. I have changed over to single trace, otherwise I can't move the load at all. Afraid I beat up my knee worse than ever. End of my ski broke, but I mended it with tin. Fearful work this, as the dogs flounder about in the snow and the back sledge continually slips off the track into deep snow alongside. Snow drifting intermittently. Thank goodness, it will make a crust. John suggests going back for paraffin and more dog food. I'm all against it, especially as I think he's really thinking of my knee.

For managing a sledge on pack-ice, you really want ash skis, 7 cms. wide and no longer than your own height. They should have our patent binding, and seal-skin sewn on below.

[Rymill and I were both continually experimenting to devise a binding which could be used with different sizes of seal-skin boots, yet which would give one sufficient rigidity to permit down-hill running and even turns; at the same time it would have to contain no metal (otherwise it would freeze the feet), and would have to include some device so that the skis could be kicked off immediately if one went through the ice, or had to walk about among the dogs. At last we invented the following: A strip of double balata belting the width of the ski, and a strip of thick leather three inches wide at right angles

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

to it are—with the same four screws—fixed on to the ski. The leather is cut so that it will lace up to fit over whatever footwear one has. Two pieces of  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch lamp-wick are sewn diagonally on to the back of the belting so that they can be tied on top of the foot. An inch above the belting they are connected by a heel-strap to prevent the foot slipping backwards. This heel-strap is continued to fit through two holes in the leather toe-cap to tie up above the toes. This binding will collect no snow, and in the coldest weather the lamp-wick is pliable. On thin ice the lamp-wick strings are left untied so that the feet can easily be pulled from the toe-caps. The binding is adjustable for length and width of boot and also for rigidity. It is so firm that linked telemarks can be done on a steep hill.]

Had six candles in tent to-night to melt drinking water. Bread finished now, but plenty of munch and chocolate left. While John was prospecting ahead to-day, with the glasses I saw a bear on a hummock far out to sea.

*February 12th.* Only made two miles yesterday. Blew gustily all night and still blowing. Slept in wool helmet and scarf, so kept warm. Clear, cloudless day with very much drift, impossible to travel. Read aloud, very contented and comfortable; it's amazing how little food one needs. At midday the wind dropped a little, so John went out to prospect a route overland to the next fjord.

John returned after five hours to say snow a yard deep everywhere. He still talks of going back; I can't see it myself.

*February 13th.* A grim ominous morning. Heavily overcast with a crimson line out to sea. Away after much digging at 8.0. Frightful going, sledges and skis don't sink in much, but dogs do. Went right outside Ananah island. Very rotten ice here near some big bergs; the tide wears the ice away underneath but it all

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

looks the same on the surface. Red Fox went right through once, and when I took my skis off to right the sledge I put both feet through but hung on to the sledge: there must be a strong current here and only the overlying snow holds the ice together. Going better with occasional windswept patches and once a quarter of a mile of hard new ice, which was only just bearing. The ice always seems rotten by the edge of floes. Later we got miles of absolutely awful going with deep sticky soft snow. The dogs made a deep trail into which only one runner of the sledge would slip, then the sledge would overturn. I drove my dogs in single file on a long central trace; they go alright following John's sledge, but it would probably not work if I were alone. A mass of slushy ice weighing several pounds would collect on the front of the dogs' harnesses, I have never known this happen before. Both teams got mutinous and we had to use the whip incessantly. We particularly wanted to get across the bay to Katunak, because all day out to sea the snow was swirling about as if there was a great wind there, and at 3.0 o'clock, as we feared, it came our way, preceded by snow, which has been falling all day on the hill-tops. So shrouded in snow is everything that we could not find a large floe on which to camp. We only just got the tent up in the increasing blizzard. Knee rather beaten up to-day; it feels all hot and wobbly inside and makes queer noises. Grim day. We both got too thirsty to eat anything. Saw several Ravens: one lot of three, courting; queer birds Ravens! Our camp is two miles from land. . . . God, what a night! The blizzard got worse and worse. I read the whole of *The Pavilion on the Links* to John; often I had to stop because the noise of the gale was so terrific. Just like old times, with the tent flapping like mad and swaying about. I had just finished the story of François Villon when suddenly we heard strange, fearful noises above the groaning of the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

storm. There was a dull concussion (the whole tent shook) followed by a series of ominous noises like snow settling. The pack was breaking up.

We dressed hurriedly and John went out to investigate, while I packed up everything inside. The air was saturated with snow outside and John said it was impossible to breathe or to see anything at all. It was no good trying to move. The tent seemed a bit queer, so we looked under the ground-sheet and discovered a great crack in the ice diagonally right across the tent. All through the night this crack kept on widening, while one side of it occasionally subsided with a thump. Soon the crack was nearly a foot wide and water was visible below. We regretted having left the cod lines behind ! All the time the gale was howling like a thing possessed, and to change the position of the tent, was, of course, out of the question. We could only sit and wait on the same side of the crack, all ready for the next thing to happen. We expected the pack to break up at any moment and hoped we would be able to get out on to a floe. At 5.0 A.M. the wind died down enough for us to have no immediate fears, so we slept till dawn. The day disclosed a series of cracks under one side of the tent and a wide one dividing my team. Poor old Henson was hanging by his harness with his feet in the water. There were huge drifts all round us and the tent was all hunched over on one side. There was open water right across out to sea and the pack had broken up behind us and alongside, within a mile of the tent. A very lucky escape.

*February 14th.* Not away till 10.0. Firm ice the way we want to go, and surface miles better now. All levelled out wonderfully, but many cracks about, good windcrust in places. Snowy all day and bad visibility. Dogs pull well: I returned to fan trace in case of thin ice. Ahead we can either go by a notoriously dangerous channel or over a low col in an otherwise mountainous

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

island called Ikowe. Chose latter and camped on ice near island.

*February 15th.* Same dull weather. Clouds down to within 20 feet of ground, but only thin cloud above. Very warm. Fresh bear and fox tracks round and round some huge icebergs here. We crossed the col, but coming down the far side found an almost vertical drop of thirty feet on to the ice. We lowered the sledges down one at a time with a rope; the dogs panicked, but it was good soft falling and none were hurt. Visibility awful. Went between what we thought were islands—and they were. Map is all wrong here. Rather thin ice in parts with wet snow on top. Further on found superb going with long hard rounded drifts: the dogs and sledges didn't go through the crust, but we do without skis. The sun suddenly shone out on all the hill-tops, leaving white skirting clouds below. Truly this is the most austerely beautiful country in the world. Where the land closed in near the settlement of Sermilik we suddenly found open water in front and had to cross the fjord to avoid it. As it got dark we camped on one of the small islands out in the fjord. It is good to have land below us again. Several Ravens about to-day. This trip is taking a lot out of us: I suppose one gets soft in the winter idleness. We are certainly having an advanced course of sledging this expedition!

*February 16th.* A comfortable sheltered camp. As we haven't paraffin to cook pemmican and porridge we live pretty well entirely on munch and chocolate. Lovely day, 40 degrees of frost, low mist on the fjord with incredible lights from the early morning sun. The open water gives off black fog like a train. Left tent at 7.30. The sun is strangely distorted by the fog. Very cold day; our helmets starched stiff with the frost. From the top of this island it appears there is open water pretty well right across except in one spot. We skied on to test

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

this place. With a fine powdering of snow all the ice looked exactly the same. I have a different method of testing the ice from John: I test every single step in a place like this. Suddenly I found terribly thin ice and shouted to John who was further along. Too late, he had gone through right over his head. His skis came off and stayed under the ice. He lost his ice-spear too, and a fur glove. The ice broke under him each time he tried to pull himself out on to it. He must have been in nearly two minutes before he managed to get out over my skis. He didn't seem terribly cold. Walking back without skis he put a foot through several times. The ice is absolutely rotted here by strong currents under the ice. John got into his sleeping bag for a bit and I gave him my warm underclothes. Luckily I always carry a complete change of clothes. We got away at 10.0 and tried the other side of the fjord. I went ahead, and testing every step picked a way over half a mile of most dangerous ice to another island. An iceberg, weighing I don't know how many thousand tons, was simply rushing past the island, propelled by tide or wind, and pushing several acres of ice with it which formed a pressure ridge as it buckled and piled up on to the firmer ice beyond: a most awe-inspiring sight. A single Black Guillemot in the open water. We crossed safely though the ice sagged visibly beneath our sledges: it would have been fatal to stop. There is a short way to Sermiligak settlement, but it is through a very dangerous channel called Sarfak. From a hill-top John saw in the distance an Eskimo returning to Sermiligak. Reluctantly we decided to go the longer way. After four hours of fast safe going we were at the head of Kangerdluarsikajik: the ice looked a bit grey here, but John passed safely over. I had twice as heavy a load on my sledge and the whole thing went straight through. I went through too, but held on to the floating sledge; we put skis across under the

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

bows of the sledge and managed to get it out. The water ran in at the top of my seal-skin trousers and down into my boots.

As it got dark we crossed the low col at the head of this fjord and got into Sermiligak Fjord. The settlement, and all it stood for—dry clothes, hot seal-meat and good company, lay only five miles down the fjord, but it was almost dark and we didn't know if the ice was safe. After some argument we decided to push on. The ice was firm, but had nine inches of soft slush which made very heavy going. We hugged the shore so as not to miss the settlement which seemed a weary way on. I tried to fire off my pistol, so that the natives would hear it and answer, but the works had frozen up. As grim an evening as I ever remember; my wet clothes went as hard as boards and my feet lost all feeling. Only the stars, and the aurora playing hide-and-seek with the clouds, kept me going. At last, after three or four hours, we heard dogs and soon after our teams got the scent and pulled wildly on. We saw the lights of Narda's windows. Dogs all silent now, not a soul about. We walked into Yelmar's house. What a moment! They were all in bed, but still had the lamps on. Narda came bursting in and there was great excitement. "How on earth had we come down alone?" "How many bears had Enock shot?" We were given lumps of seal-meat and listened to their news. There has been a fearful 'flu epidemic and many of the great old hunters are dead—Nicodemudgy, alas, among them. They have been sledging to Angmagssalik and back this month. The ice was perfect, hard and dry, till a few days ago. Jamesi, of Sermilik, got three bears. A boy fell through the tide-crack and was drowned at Ikatek. A young man was caught out in a blizzard and had died of exposure only a mile from his house. There has been a fearful famine. At Cape Dan and at Angmagssalik settlement they have had no seals and half the dogs are

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

dead of starvation. There is no blubber for the stoves. A week ago three sledges went through the ice quite near the settlement: no lives were lost, but all the dogs, save one, were drowned: so they won't be able to come to Lake Fjord this spring. We were given the window bench in Narda's enormous house and simply stuffed ourselves with seal. We were given a Long-tailed Duck too. There are places here that never freeze over, owing to the tide, and as well as seal they get Brunnich's and Black Guillemots and Long-tails all winter. They have seen no bears yet and are wildly excited about our tales of all the tracks we have seen.

*February 17th.* Slept like logs. Oh, what a marvellous life ! A few hours ago untold misery, and now—all a man can want. Ate all day. Yelmar brought us frozen cod; he told me wonderful tales of bear and narwhal hunts. When he talks slowly I can understand all he says. They have a tremendous respect for the unusual strength and cunning of bears. No one here has ever found a bear embryo: I suppose they only breed away up north. A north-east gale to-day. Our sledges blew over and we had to bring all the gear inside. Thank God we aren't still camping out in the fjord. Drum-dancing till late at night. They are all very good at it here. All the Eskimos say that if you whistle loudly the northern lights will start to rush about—as they do now and then. It certainly seemed to have that effect when they demonstrated it. We must tell the Royal Society about this, in case it has escaped their notice. Another humorist said that if you throw up dog dung the aurora stops. This did not work when tried.

*February 18th.* Impossible to move about outside. Violent wind and drift. Our dogs are eating huge meals. A big Greenland seal was dragged into the house. It was shot last summer, so is fairly ripe, but it has been under 12 feet of snow most of the time. The blubber was a bit

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

rancid, but the meat excellent, though it gave me a pain. Everyone came in from all three houses and then fell upon the seal, eating such masses of raw meat that all their faces and arms were bloody. In the evening one of the men blacked his face, tied his hair in a top-knot and dressed up as an old pregnant woman with a baby on her back. He acted simply marvellously. It is an old game in which he drum-dances, converses with "the baby" in a high cracked voice, and collects something for "the baby" from everybody present. This was followed by the "whale-dance" in which the drum-dancer fills his mouth with water and at the end of each verse comes up close and sprays the water all over you!

*February 19th.* Up at 5.0. Narda is coming with us to Kuamiut to show us the route over the islands. The direct way through Ikerasak is no longer safe. Two hours over sea-ice first. It is very soggy in places. Drifting hard when we started, and all day we saw the snow blowing about out to sea and further south. We had to follow a ravine over a very steep island. At the top there was a frightful traverse on a hard slippery incline with a 20-foot drop into a gully down below. We got the sledges over one at a time. Then we went up and down over odd lakes and hills till we reached the fjord again. The rest at Sermiligak has done my knee good. Narda has five tiny dogs, but they pull him along at a great speed. Blinding wind and drift in places. Lost Narda in drift and snow too hard to show tracks, so we arrived at Kuamiut on the sea-ice—which is supposed to be unsafe—while all the people rushed out to meet us by land, the way Narda arrived. More news: the *Lord Talbot* has been in again but not Captain Watson. Apparently he got nothing from America for his rescue of the Flying Family, not even a letter of thanks, and as a consequence of the whole business he has lost his ship.

Grand lot of Eskimos here. Tinbergen and his wife

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

are staying with Karali, but there is room for us on the floor. All the natives admire Salo very much, he is the biggest dog they have ever seen, but they are always scared stiff of strange dogs. They have lots of seal here, as they catch them in nets beneath the ice. The fjord here has only recently frozen over and is good for breathing-hole hunting. For supper we had red fish, which are caught with hook and line through a hole in the ice. Last week they got a halibut in this way. Very convivial evening, playing childish games and dancing.

*February 20th-21st.* Bad weather, impossible to travel. Made notes on language and went round visiting. I believe it would be a good thing to sew seal-skin on to the runners of Nansen sledges. They would slide easier and ice would not collect so much: bladder-nose seal-skin would be best.

*February 22nd.* Dull day, but fine. Bought three dogs, but it is difficult to get dogs here as they don't want money, and use their dogs a great deal to reach the hunting grounds. I always like a man who won't sell his dogs. Two young hunters came with us; their teams are very slow. After crossing the fjord we followed a river valley for miles. When we got on to the fjord again we met an Eskimo who had just hunted a seal which was lying out on the ice—very early in the year for this sort of hunting. Stopped at another settlement and bought two rather small dogs which we will pick up on our return. Some of the dogs at this place are very fierce. Met a Cape Dan Eskimo here and bought two dogs from him: he is going to deliver them at Angmagssalik. We hear there is no food there, so we bought a few seals here for dog-food. Went miles up a narrow fjord and then up a long glacier in the dark. No crevasses, but very steep. It is a sort of miniature ice cap.

We did not know this route. At the top of the glacier we had to cross a desperately steep traverse below which

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

is an almost vertical drop of several hundred feet into a lake. A team went over last year and were all killed. We could see nothing, which made it more sinister, but got across all right. Soon we got among rocks, and our guides disappeared into the darkness telling us to be very careful to follow them closely as it was very steep and dangerous. However, as they immediately drove on at the hell of a speed we lost their tracks and got on to the steepest and most formidable place I have ever sledged in. We put all our chain and rope drags on but they made little difference. My sledge got quite out of control and went careering down sometimes in front of the dogs, sometimes on top of them, now backwards, now sideways, and often rolling over and over. I got thrown clear of the sledge after the first somersault and slid on my back to the bottom of the hill. As there were a number of rocks about and wind-hollows six feet deep round the larger boulders, it was surprising that neither I nor the dogs had any broken bones. It took some time to untangle the dogs and to tighten up the lashing again, while the two natives struck matches to show us where to make for.

John fared worse. His sledge slipped into one of the deep wind-hollows beside a boulder, and when he got out of that he dropped a kitbag off his sledge, which went shooting down the slope till it was lost in the darkness. There were one or two more steep drops down on to the fjord and then a good run on hard going to the settlement, which we reached at 9 P.M. It was very odd that though it was completely overcast the aurora showed through with quite a glow. Left our sledges outside the shop and went to pay our respects to the Governor and found him in bed with sciatica. Got to bed at 2.0 after waking up Stilling Berg and hearing all the gossip from him.

*February 24th.* Our three Kuamiut dogs have run back home, in spite of our giving them plenty of meat.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

John is tinning his runners to protect them over hard ice. I am putting two additional narrow metal-shod runners on the top of my sledge so that I can use the wide ski runners in deep soft snow and then just turn the sledge upside down—changing over handle-bars and load—when I get on to sea-ice, I shall now have the advantages of both types of sledge.

*February 25th.* Shopping, looking at dogs and over-eating. Enock is a great favourite here and everyone wants to know how he is. I met a man from Isortok who once visited Lake Fjord by umiak on his way down from wintering at Nualik. He said he caught a salmon so big that he could not make his hands meet round its middle. He speared another with his bird-dart, but it pulled the dart down with it and was never seen again. None of them have seen the bear-trap which Kagsagsik, the mythical hero, is supposed to have built there.

*February 26th.* What a waste of marvellous weather ! Our plan was to stay here and choose dogs from the natives' teams as they came to buy stuff at the shop, but they aren't coming much, and most of the dogs are miserably light and underfed.

*February 27th.* At last about twenty sledges arrived from most of the settlements up Sermilik and from Cape Dan. Met many old friends and heard all the latest news. It has been a lean winter everywhere and any dogs we buy will need feeding up. Gustav Holm writes that in 1882 all the dogs in the whole district were killed, owing to famine, except a couple at Sermilik and another pair at Kuamiut. This sort of thing has often happened to a certain extent since, so no wonder the dogs here are a measly and interbred race. All sorts of sledges: most of the old Angmagssalik type, narrow and with low handle-bars, others have the West Coast sledge, wider and with long backward-curving handle-bars; they don't favour the upright A-shaped ones which are strongest, most efficient

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

and better for braking downhill. One native drives only three dogs, most have five or six, the greatest team is eight. Most of them wear seal-skin trousers and boots, and cotton anoraks with sweaters underneath; one man had dog-skin trousers which looked very smart, but when he arrived he went and changed into riding breeches, a European cap and a pink check anorak! They carry the seal-skin anorak on the sledge in case of bad weather; most of these garments have dog-fur edging round the hood and bottom. We could not buy some of the dogs we wanted, but at last got four fairly good ones, though some of them are of the light fast type. We pay 10 shillings each, and a little more if necessary. The shop is beginning to get short of provisions already.

*February 28th.* Away at last. Good going up to the glacier and down onto Angmagssalik Fjord. It is an exceptional ice year, because early in the month it was possible, for the first time for ten or fifteen years, to sledge right round by the open coast to Angmagssalik Fjord. Several people came with us and wanted a lift: there were five people on my sledge at one time! Dogs pulling marvellously along a well-worn track like an arterial road. Reached Kuamiut before dark; my convertible sledge works wonderfully. I think two inches is the ideal width for metal runners and they must be nailed on, not screwed—oddly enough, the latter work out.

We went to see an *angakok* séance in one of the winter-houses, having persuaded Karali to get an old Eskimo to perform. They never do it nowadays, even in burlesque. This started as a joke, but so convincing was the whole thing that the audience soon got very worked up and most of them took it seriously. We all crowded on to the sleeping bench and the floor in front, while the *angakok* sat in front of the entrance passage with his back to us. The windows were darkened with skins; a hairless seal-skin hung across the doorway, while an ordinary seal-skin

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

hung vertically. The drum and drum-stick lay on a flat stone to the left of the *angakok*. All lamps were extinguished. The man's wrists were not bound together as they were in the old days. Soon the seal-skins started rubbing together with an eerie noise, the drum beat in a most elusive way and weird voices spoke, coming from all corners of the room. The beating became more and more insistent and soon the whole room echoed with uncanny sounds. The *angakok*'s language consists of archaic and now unused words, so I could understand nothing. The older Eskimos could remember when these séances were frequently performed to cure a sick man or so that the *angakok* could visit the moon, or the old woman of the sea, to put an end to a period of famine. They soon became ecstatic, incessantly shouting what sounded like "Goi ! hoi hoi hoi !" and sometimes shouting out questions which the *angakok* answered in an unnatural tone of voice. The heat was stifling, and what with the pandemonium of voices and haunting sounds, the continual beating of the drum and the rattling of seal-skins, the atmosphere was hypnotic, and one could have seen spirits with ease. At last the lamps were lit again, the exhausted *angakok* was helped to his feet and we all hurried out into the cool night air. I have never before realised the power of mass emotion.

*March 1st.* Heavenly day. Up at 5.0. Away at 8.0. Ten dogs each now, so we go at a rattling speed over the ice and up across the big island to Sermiligak. Absolute hell at the top: the wind has made a series of iron-hard steps two feet high on a general angle of 30 degrees, sloping down to a vertical drop into a gully. My dogs got wild, and though both of us hung on to the sledge it rolled over and over so that one runner was smashed. Spent an hour mending it, then got down the gully all right with chains. Reached Sermiligak at 4.0. Not bad going, 30 miles in seven travelling hours. Two

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

hunters from Cape Dan here; they say the ice is good everywhere, but seals are scarce.

*March 2nd.* Cloudy and snowing a little. Several hunters came with us to show us the way up Sarfak, the channel which is so dangerous. We followed the tide-crack most of the way and found open water at the corner, where most of the Eskimos stayed to hunt. Yelmar and Narda are coming as far as Utorkarmiut to look for bears. Going good. Lumps of hard ice protrude through the snow, so sledges turned over fairly often. New dogs quite undisciplined. We had to haul sledges bodily up the ascent on Ikowe island. From the top we saw two bears, a big one and a cub, out on the ice. They look very yellow against the snow. The natives went after them, but we felt we must get back home, so reluctantly left the hunt, though our dogs got wildly excited following the bear tracks. There is deep snow here with water and slush on the ice, so I turned my sledge over on to the ski runners. Went behind Ananah this time to cut over the glacier into the channel behind Sartermie. Moon came out and it started to snow. Three feet of snow, fearful going, apparently they've had no wind here. Camped at 8.0. Grand meal of porridge and tea. How lovely it is to relax after a terrific day's work, to snuggle down into a sleeping bag with that comfortable feeling of fullness, then just to watch the candle burning and discuss what we're going to do when we get back to England. On a show like this you get to know a man so well that you can tell exactly what he's thinking about and how he'll react to anything.

*March 3rd.* Clouds right down and snowing hard. Got on to the glacier, but we can't see the way off, so have had to camp.

*March 4th.* Wind howling in the mountains, but calm down on the glacier. Map very bad here, we nearly went through the wrong pass, but suddenly saw our fjord down

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

below us and ran down to it over low hummocky going, which may be land or glacier. Better going here, and we soon started to cross Kangerdlugsuatsiak which has changed enormously since we were last here. Saw a fox halfway over; they usually stop and have a good look at one. Sometimes we get stretches of snowless ice with lumps of hard black ice, six inches to two feet high, sticking through. It is very hard on the feet, because, holding on to the handle-bars, you can't see where you are walking. This surface continually overturns the sledges and tends to smash them. These Nansen sledges are not nearly strong enough for travel on the pack. Stefansson used sledges weighing 270 lb., these only weigh about 50 lb. Comfortable dry camp on a good level floe. We are just off Hell Corner.

*March 5th.* Up at 4.0 to-day for last lap. What frightful going! There are green knobs of ice as hard as glass frozen into stretches of level new ice. Sledges continually getting jammed and traces catching. The runners are almost wrenched off, and we have bruises all over our feet and legs. It's all one can do to stand up. This is the worst going I've ever seen in my life—I wonder how many times I have thought that this trip! The ice must be subject to great pressure here, as there are cracks and even narrow leads. Two of my dogs went through crossing one lead, but soon got out.

In Nigertusok we met the other kind of bad surface—deep soft snow and slush on level old ice. The sledge runners were sucked down, so that the dogs could hardly pull them; walking on skis was very hard work. Reached Enock's house at midday. It is absolutely submerged in snow. You have to crawl down a tunnel ten feet deep to get to the door. Most of the roof beams have cracked with the weight of the snow, which they are cutting away from the roof. Kidarsi has got another bear, but they have seen no seals since we left and are in rather a bad way

## A JOURNEY ON THE PACK-ICE

for food, though they still have several seals buried from the autumn. Our dogs are very tired, but we pushed on. The whole conformation of the land on the way up to the lake has changed. The snow has levelled out all the valleys in the most surprising way; it must be twenty feet deep in places. Took us two hours to cross the lake, as there are three feet of soft snow, and our dogs, especially the new ones, are absolutely done in. One of mine passed out completely and I had to let it off. It just lay in the snow, but turned up at the Base a few hours later. Saw Quintin coming to meet us. He has only had four nights alone and is in good form. He skis up the hill every day to see if there is any sign of us. Blowing and snowing now. Fed dogs on shark meat: wish we had something better for them. Incredibly deep snow everywhere. No seals lying out yet, but there have been about ten fish in the net, including one of 7 lb. How good to be home again; our hut looks amazingly small and cosy.

*“Severe weather, Sam,” observed Mr. Pickwick.*

*“Fine weather for them as is well wropped up, as the Polar bear said to himself when he was practising his skating,”*  
*replied Mr. Weller.*

CHARLES DICKENS

## CHAPTER IX

### DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

THE dogs were in such a bad way after our return from Angmagssalik that it was obvious we could not think of starting on another journey for a considerable time. Some of the new dogs were so thin that I could easily make my hands meet round their stomachs, while others were very lame from inflamed swellings on the joints of their toes.

We had managed to eliminate harness rubs by making the dog harnesses of quite thin pliable tarred rope; this material had the additional advantage of being unappetising even to the catholic taste of the dogs, but I think it would be rather hard on their shoulder joints on a long journey. At first we had covered the harnesses with strips of blanket, but as any such material will collect water and then freeze solid, the bare rope is better. Seal-skin, especially old kayak skins, make the best harnesses, but the dogs eat them when they get hungry; sailcloth is good too, but must be very strongly sewn. We connected the two loops of the harness by three canvas cross-pieces; two close together on the chest, and a third on the back of the neck. While the loops could be of fairly standard size we found it best to adjust the spacing and length of the cross-pieces to each individual dog. On a rope harness for a big dog the lowest cross-piece would be an inch wide, the next one two inches, and the one behind the neck five inches.

Before the sea-ice should break up we hoped, as well as carrying on with the local survey, to penetrate into the mountains at the head of Kangerdlugsuatsiak, if possible reaching and climbing Mount Forel, and to sledge up to Kangerdlugsuak either through mountains or by the pack-ice.

Even with the comparatively small loads we had carried

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

to and from Angmagssalik, our light Nansen sledges were so knocked about that they would have to be completely rebuilt before they could be used again. It would therefore be useless to attempt to go to Kangerdlugsuak unless the pack-ice should become very much more level. According to the Eskimos the chief thing that was needed to smooth out the pack was rain. Wind and snow together would fill in the hollows, but would form banks of drift on their own account: the rain would melt down irregularities and, according to the Eskimos, in a very short time would improve the going out of all recognition.

As soon as we returned from Angmagssalik it started to snow and blow, and we were thankful to have got back in time. A few days later the temperature rose above freezing point, and a yard of soggy wet snow on land soon settled down into a wonderful sledging surface when it froze again. But the pack still remained far too rough, and though there were intermediate thaw periods it did not actually rain.

By March 20th the dogs seemed fit enough to travel again, and as it seemed a pity to miss any of the good weather we were then getting we decided to try to reach Forel first, giving the pack a week or two in which to become more level; but there was always the fear that if we left it too late the pack might start to break up and we would then have to sledge to Kangerdlugsuak by way of the Ice Cap.

We were delayed for a few days by a spell of bad weather with a gusty wind and drifting snow, so that it was not till March 25th that we were able to start.

*March 25th.* Saw a Raven to-day. First bird I have seen here this month. Alarm went at 4. Barometer falling. Temperature 40° F., blowing, but snow too sodden to drift. When it thaws you get a good smell of mother earth again, which is very noticeable after the winter when all outdoor smells are imprisoned by the

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

frost. However, we must make a start, as time is getting so short. We have both tinned the runners of our sledges, so they go very well. Light loads; we are saving the dog pemmican for Kangerdlugsuak, and only taking dog biscuit now—100 lb. on each sledge. John is a dog short because one of his new dogs set off to walk home to Kuamiut: Enock saw its track out on the pack.<sup>1</sup> Snow drifting further out to sea and up on the glaciers, but quite good going here. The pack is surprisingly fast, as there seems to have been a touch of frost here this morning. Long smooth rounded drifts run north and south; it's grand running parallel to them but the devil of a switch-back trying to cross. It would be quite impossible with heavy loads. The going is really far too fast; our ten dogs are absolutely full of beans, and with these light loads they go flat out so that it is almost impossible to control them. John's high sledge was continually going over and the dogs would drag it on its side for some distance before he could right it again, or before it was brought up with a jerk against a snag. I have covered my runners with metal from the dog biscuit tins, and as it is rather stiff it has rounded off the edges of the runners. The consequence is that the sledge has no grip at all, and side-slips in the most appalling way.

These hog-backed drifts are often as much as a hundred yards long and about six feet high, sloping down gently on each side; once my sledge slips off the crest of the drift it shoots off sideways downhill till it sometimes gets almost level with the dogs, but at right angles to their line of travel. The sledge goes far too fast to control it by running behind, so the only thing to do is to sit astride it and hope for the best. The trouble is that as the sledge crashes broadside on, it often hits lumps of ice or falls into sudden hollows. The going got more and more broken

<sup>1</sup> When we went to Kuamiut in the following summer we enquired after this dog, but they had seen no sign of it.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

up till at last John's sledge collapsed completely. One runner doubled right underneath and the sledge subsided. All the metal brackets supporting the runner had bent, and when we tried to straighten them they snapped. The only thing to do was to return to the Base and rebuild the sledge completely. We cached our loads in the middle of a large level floe—hope the bears don't break it up—then lashed the broken sledge upside-down on my sledge, and with 18 dogs harnessed to it started homewards. One of John's dogs broke loose and started to make off at great speed in the direction of Angmagssalik, where it used to live; however, we managed to circumvent it. Raining like anything by then and a violent wind blowing in our faces: most unpleasant. We came round behind through Nigertusok to avoid the bad going, and it was dark by the time we reached Enock's winter-house. Nearly misled in the darkness by tracks leading to a place where Kidarsi had recently dug up a cached seal. Reached our hut at 11 p.m. much to Quintin's surprise. Sausages and potatoes for supper—we have no fresh meat now. Dog-tired and rather peevish. If you think the other man is in a bad temper, it's a sure sign you're in a vile temper yourself.

*March 26th.* Spent 14 hours repairing John's sledge. We screwed ash angle-blocks between every single cross-bar and upright, and tightened up all the raw-hide lashings and screwed them down at each end. Touch of toothache—hope it's not scurvy. Pouring in sheets.

*March 27th.* Enock and Kidarsi turned up at 5.30 A.M. They want to come with us as far as the next fjord to hunt bears. Heavenly day at last. Only a few degrees of frost but the surface is as hard as cement, though yesterday you went in waist-deep everywhere on land—though on the sea it was hard enough. A real good-to-be-alive spring day. Dogs fairly galloped down the fjord. Very fast going on the pack, which has

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

smoothed out visibly since yesterday. Amazing what a difference rain makes. Very hot: discarded gloves, hat and sweaters. Wore snow-glasses, it's the devil the way they cloud up inside with sweat. Dogs refuse to stop, but better with heavy loads.

Heard Snow Buntings passing over to-day: surely very early. Snow thundering down the gullies in grand little avalanches. Following Enock's advice we kept near the tide-crack where water has continually oozed out, making quite good hard level going. We picked up our loads and soon reached Hell Corner. Heavens, how hot! Took some film. Passed a ruined winter-house with fox tracks everywhere. The ice improved as we got further up Kangerdlugsuatsiak and soon we met level bay-ice. The pack-ice never seems to penetrate far into the fjords, I suppose it's kept out by local winds: a good job anyway. The tin on John's runners is fraying and keeping him back by dragging on the ice. Saw a seal lying out—the first we've seen this year. We sledged to within a quarter of a mile, then Enock took my hunting screen and went after it, but it went down before he could get within range. Enock hasn't got a hunting screen: the natives would never think of keeping one from spring to spring, nor do they ever make anything till their need for it is pressing.

The ice is getting thinner and thinner now as we approach the narrows of Kangerdlugsuatsiak. It is one of the places where shallow water and a violent tide prevent the ice forming all winter. One always finds the remains of dwelling-houses near such places, as seals can be taken all the year round. There are several large pools of open water with rocks showing and treacherous ice for a mile or two. This is the spot where an Eskimo told Gustav Holm in 1884 that his father had killed a Great Auk.<sup>1</sup> We had to go carefully over ice less than 6 inches thick but very crisp—not at all like sea-ice. I think much of it

<sup>1</sup> See *Meddelelser om Grönland*, vol. xxxix. p. 111.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

is frozen rain. Saw quite a number of seals lying out, but the runners make such a noise on this hard ice that they went down. We climbed a hill to see if we could pass the open water, and suddenly a seal put its head up through some rotten ice below us. Kidarsi ran down and missed it twice. It is really surprising what bad shots the Eskimos are. Though they and their dogs haven't had fresh seal-meat for weeks, Enock says "It doesn't matter not getting seals to-day because they are here anyway, and we shall get plenty to-morrow." But to-morrow the ice may break up or it will snow! We can pass the open water by going round over land. Camped near the shore at dusk and ran out to the nearest pool to try and get a seal: we saw several out in the open water. The ice is terribly thin; I would not have considered it safe, but Enock seemed quite happy about it though I saw him put a foot through twice, and there is such a current underneath that one would get swept away at once. Enock missed a seal at 15 yards. I managed to shoot one, and luckily it drifted into the firmer ice so we could get it. One needs a small boat for this hunting, a kayak would not do because it would soon get smashed being carried on a sledge over the pack.

The natives have a cotton tent which they put up, using their ice-spears as tent-poles. They take their sledges inside and sleep on top of them wearing all their clothes. We asked them into our tent for supper and had a wonderful meal of seal-meat. Enock is a grand man! To-day we sledged along the foot of a magnificent range of mountains with six jagged peaks. The rock looked good: it would make a wonderful traverse. Reading Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, but very sleepy. Sledging over the pack is the hardest work I know.

*March 28th.* Face very sore to-day. I always suffer more from sun and snowburn than from frostbite. Glorious day, 11° F., no wind and burning hot. We all

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

set off towards the glacier at the head of the fjord. The natives will look for bears there and we will try to find a way up the glacier, which should lead us in about forty miles straight to Forel. The nearer we got the more forbidding and impossible the glacier looked. Enock found bear tracks and a place where a seal had been killed and eaten. What great powers of scent the bears must have ! We went across to the dump which John left here in the autumn (see page 157), and though the flags marking it had disappeared we found the boxes by probing with ice-spears.

In the summer there is a big river here and there is still enough water flowing to have kept a small pool open. Lying on the ice and gazing down into the water, I saw quite a number of trout about eight inches long. I made a hook out of a safety-pin and baiting it with a bit of paper managed to catch a few for supper: a pleasantly Crusoe-like occupation. Enock and Kidarsi turned homewards while John and I went on up the fjord. What a marvellous place this is ! On each side of the fjord are huge jagged topped mountains, some of them as much as 6,000 feet high, with local glaciers flowing down between them at unbelievably steep angles straight on to the sea-ice. High cirrus clouds dapple the intensely blue sky above the main glacier of Kangerdlugsuatsiak. This great river of ice is several miles wide where it meets the fjord in a chaotic vertical wall a hundred feet high, reflecting all imaginable shades of blue and green. The glacier winds its way mysteriously into the hills with many tributary glaciers joining it. If only we can get up the first bit the rest should go fairly easily.

The sun has thawed the crust in places so the dogs sink in a bit, but the going is still pretty good. While still a mile from the ice wall we met a high pressure ridge running right across the fjord. The glacier flows all the winter and masses of ice continually break from the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

terminal wall as in summer. Since the fjord is frozen over the debris cannot get away, so its accumulation pushes back the sea-ice making a few hundred yards of the most impossible going I have ever encountered. We had to use ice-axes even to cross it on foot; to get the sledges over we had to carry the loads and sledges on our backs and then lead the dogs. The ice is split up into crevasse-like hollows six feet wide and with vertical sides; in some places deep soft snow shrouds everything so that you can't tell where you are going.

When we eventually reached the edge of the glacier we found a steeply sloping snow bank quite impossible for the sledges, and so hard that we had to cut steps. We clearly can't get this way. But from here we can see a wide fjord and a glacier in the north-east corner of the fjord. This glacier is not marked on any of the maps and has probably never been seen before by Europeans. We must try it, though it will lead us away from Forel.

Cut up the seal for the dogs; they smelt it, though we did it behind an iceberg, and both teams bolted and got tied up in the most awful tangle. In a case like this John and I never indulge in recriminations but just set to work and repair the damage. Fried seal and trout for supper. Patched my seal-skin boots. Looks like snow to-morrow. Very bad toothache to-day—an exposed nerve which reacts violently to heat or cold. Face peeling too, so am none too happy. Both John and I find that our toes, through frostbite on the last expedition, are completely insensitive.

*March 29th.* Sky gradually cleared in evening, showing a baby moon over the glacier. Quite clear now. We cook porridge for breakfast and have milk and sugar with it, but to save time we just melt water to drink instead of making tea. There are bear tracks everywhere here. I suppose they use this glacier as a way down from the Ice Cap to the coast. We crossed over to Thank God glacier:

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

quite good going on the fjord with frozen rain puddles on the top of the ice which are very fast. It is possible to get up here. There are a hundred yards of frightful going, then a fine hard slope for two miles up against the right-hand side of the glacier. It is very uneven and there are many crevasses, but with one sledge taken at a time it ought to go. The first bit consists of a hundred yards of hard blue ice-debris piled up right across the glacier front. We found a gap and smoothed it out a bit with ice-axes, then, very laboriously, we got the sledges over one at a time. The runners side-slipped a lot up on the glacier, and once my sledge went backwards down a deep hole; we harnessed the dogs on to the back of the sledge and managed to pull it out.

The going is as hard as could be and like a switchback. None of the crevasses at the edge are more than a few feet wide. We put our feet through occasionally but kept a good hold on the handle-bars.

One or two dogs went down but the harnesses held and we pulled them out again. Some dogs get half frenzied with fear among crevasses or on thin ice, while others never turn a hair. There are parallel lines of hummocky ice running right down the glacier but we managed to keep in the hollows between. Got out of the rough going at 4 P.M. and on to the smooth hard gently sloping surface of the upper glacier. Clouding over now. Very hard day but most satisfactory to get all our gear up in a single day.

*March 30th.* Lay up. Dull day. Temperature 28° F. Low clouds over the hills; snow on and off all day. Several dogs have bitten their traces and are wandering about. Our teams haven't got used to each other yet. Slept twelve hours. We have brought a tin of flour with us to make "deadlies" on days we can't travel. We make a thin paste of flour and water and then fry it in butter on an old tin-lid: jam and butter to taste—while they last. Fricassée of seal in the evening. The day was

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

spoiled for me by my spilling a tin of condensed milk on to my reindeer skin ! One must be careful not to dry seal-skin boots too much or they go hard and unpliant. Started *Green's History of the English People*. I am still sleeping in a single eiderdown bag. The tent is nice and roomy in warm weather.

*March 31st.* Temperature 10° F. Cirro-cumulus clouds and a fresh wind. Kept going steadily upwards with the glacier. Started survey. We take compass bearings on all the larger peaks and glaciers, then use an abney level to fix their heights, and aneroid readings to check our altitude. The trouble is it's so difficult recognising mountains from successive stations.

John's dogs going much better than mine these days. Tributary glaciers fall steeply on to the main glacier, and though we are 2,000 feet up, peaks tower another 4,000 feet above us. We want to make westwards but the glaciers trend always north. We left the sledges and skied up a smaller glacier which looked fairly amiable. We took a rope but didn't use it as there were no visible crevasses although the slope was great. Suddenly I saw a hole in the ground and looked down into a simply huge crevasse full of lovely frost-tracery inside. We retreated hastily following our ski tracks back again. I was in front, and hearing a noise looked round to see that John has slipped through a crevasse up to his shoulders. By the time I had turned he had managed to pull himself out, but one ski went down. This crevasse was very wide and apparently bottomless—why are these crevasses so thinly bridged over after all these yards of snow ? It is rather serious John having lost a ski. I have never seen crevasses so cunningly concealed as they are in this country. The trouble is if one of us goes down when we are roped together it is almost impossible for the other to pull him out—and John weighs 16 stone. Another trip I shall take block and tackle with me !

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

We soon passed over the crest of the glacier and found a wide open plateau which we named Salisbury Plain. It is several miles wide and stretches as far as we can see ahead. Mountains surround it, separated by other smaller glaciers. Twenty miles ahead there are hills just like the ones round the Base. At last we found the way up to the left and followed it till dark. This country is a maze of mountain ranges and glaciers all more or less crevassed. Each corner we turn and each col we climb discloses new peaks and new ice slopes. Had our last bit of seal-meat for supper.

*April 1st.* Cloudy, doubtful if possible to travel; so started plotting the traverse. We have been travelling north and are miles east of Forel. Set off at 9 and soon met the biggest crevasses I have ever seen in my life: just isolated ones twenty yards wide and continuing right across the glacier. They are worse ahead, so we decided to walk up to a col and see what lies beyond. Temperature  $10^{\circ}$  F. and sunny. Good surface, six inches of powder snow on hard windcrust. John has only one ski but can get along all right. From the top of the col we looked down over a steep ice slope of 500 feet on to a huge glacier many miles wide, coming from the northwest with a network of simply vast crevasses. There is an equally crevassed branch coming from the southwest. We look across the glacier to some magnificent rugged peaks about 10,000 feet high. There seemed to be a local blizzard in one of the valleys on the other side; we could see the snow blowing about in angry clouds.

With only two of us it would be madness to try to cross these glaciers, so we must give up the idea of reaching Forel and turn this into a survey party.

Face very painful. The sun has raised blisters and made cracks all over it and now the temperature is well below zero and a cold wind makes it sting like hell. I

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

ought to wear a snow-veil. We will climb a hill to-morrow and see what happens round to the north-west. If we can't get that way we must return and map Kangerdlugsuatsiak and then go back to the Base in time to sledge north on the pack. Pemmican to-night. Grand stuff. Gosh how it fills one up ! Salo ate his harness again—ungrateful brute ! This day two years ago I was with Stevenson and Wager trying to reach Forel from the south. The mountain wins again.

*April 2nd.* Left tent standing and most of gear here, and sledged across to climb a mountain overlooking the big glacier. Quite an exciting climb. I have Bilgeri crampons on my skis to stop them side-slipping, and seal-skin sewn on to prevent slipping back. Soon we had to leave our skis and cut steps up the last bit. All the stones are loose up here as they collect the heat of the sun which melts the ice beneath them, so it's rather dangerous climbing. Icy places are very bad for seal-skin boots. We have made wooden soles so that we can wear ice crampons over seal-skin boots, but it doesn't look as if we shall have a chance to try them out. Unroped on the top and took photos and made sketches of the mountains. We can't get this way, so there is nothing for it but to return. From up here we can see right down on to the pack-ice stretching for miles and miles out to the horizon : here and there a few big icebergs protrude from the level pack ; there are no leads of open water yet.

Very good glissade down to our skis, then a grand ski run to the sledges. Hope to get down to Kangerdlugsuatsiak to-morrow.

*April 3rd.* Good day. Up at 4. Blazing hot now. Followed tracks back most of the day. We rode on downhill bits ; my knee works quite well these days though there is still a lot of water on it. Very slippery going down the end of the glacier. In one place, where there was a steep slope above an open crevasse, we had

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

to unlash the loads and then cut steps before carrying the boxes over one at a time. The stretch on to the sea-ice was as bad as ever. When we were just coming off the glacier a huge mass of ice fell from the snout of one of the hanging glaciers a thousand feet above us; we thought it would hit us at first, but most of it fell to one side. Solid-looking cauliflower clouds of powdered ice were formed together with a noise like thunder—just like a film avalanche.

Went on after dark and reached the dump at 8 P.M. A terrific day; a forty-five mile run with fair loads.

*April 4th.* John surveyed the fjord while I hunted. Several seals out but they all went down before I got there. I shot a seal in a pool of open water but could not recover it. Blazing hot day. The ice rings with a nasty hollow note and is very brittle.

Tooth very painful to-day. We will start early tomorrow and try to get back to the Base in one day.

An unpleasant accident this evening: I had boiled the water but couldn't find the tea, so put the pot on a flour tin with the pan-lifter still on. Mucking about looking for the tea I knocked the pot over, and grabbing at it spilt it all over my arm and one foot—not to mention my reindeer-skin. I got the sock and sleeve off at once and put lots of butter on it, then lint and bandages. It hurt terribly for an hour or so and came up in big red blisters.

*April 5th.* Away at 6. No seals out now, it is colder again. A very grim day. My foot hurts with each step and my team not going at all well. It makes one very bad-tempered when the other man gets ahead and won't wait, but it would probably make one even more annoyed if he did wait.

Got into very rough going about Hell Corner. Great many bear tracks here, in a few inches of new snow they drag their feet all the way. In one place a bear had eaten a small seal on top of a floe—heaven knows where and

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

how he had caught it. Fox and Raven tracks all around. Good going round by Nigertusok; it's most extraordinary how the surface can vary from day to day. Back home at 5 P.M. A crowd of natives here. Kidarsi got two seals lying out in Nigertusok last week but none here yet. We keep the window open all day now with a boiling sun, though there are 20 degrees of frost most days. Quintin has seen a Snow Bunting, several Ravens and a Falcon.

This morning he found a seal in my net over by the point—the first one in the net. Most of the head was eaten away by shrimps. Quintin has made a window in the porch. I tried to develop some films, but as the solution cooled down from 70° to 45° in a few minutes, it wasn't very successful. Kept awake by toothache. There is nothing like getting home again and having a bath and shave when you haven't washed or had your clothes off for a fortnight. I think one becomes mercifully immune to one's own smell. We had quite a good party and finished off our last bottle of "schnapps." I think regular alcohol is a bad thing on an expedition, but once in a while, on birthdays and after journeys, it is a good thing. If you are harbouring a grudge against your companion, under the genial influence of alcohol you tell him all about it and having laid the trouble you can start anew.

After this journey our dogs once more seemed very exhausted. This was simply due to unavoidable underfeeding. They had had plenty of shark-meat before the last journey, but that is not much good without blubber—the same applies to dog biscuits which they had lived on for the last fortnight. It was difficult to know what to do next. The dogs could not go to Kangerdlugsuak in the state they then were. In any case before we could start northward on the pack we would have to make a journey through the mountains to make sure we could get back that way.

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

In the middle of April several large leads appeared out in the pack, and after sledging out to examine them it was obvious that we would have to try to reach Kangerdlugsuak by way of the Ice Cap. And the very next day, too late to be of any use to us, it started to pour with rain and went on raining for several days. Avalanches of wet snow crashed down the hills and pools of rain-water formed on top of the ice. On April 21st, with the object of sledging in to try and find a way through to the Ice Cap, we drove round on the sea-ice to the branch fjord which seemed to give the easiest approach to the high mountainous country inland.

It was impossible to scale the actual glacier wall, but we found a steep slope at about  $60^{\circ}$  right against the edge of the glacier; as it was only fifty yards long we left the dogs at the bottom and hauled up the loads, a box or two at a time. By evening we had all the loads, including four weeks' dog-food for the Kangerdlugsuak journey, on the foot of the glacier. After that a fairly easy way could be found, parallel to and between the lines of rough crevassed ice which run up and down the last half mile of the glacier. As the clouds were too low for us to find our way upwards, and as it looked as if bad weather was coming, we returned to the Base.

On the way back we stopped to examine a seal hole and noticed that there was a considerable swell beneath the ice; the tide-crack was groaning too as if there was a big storm somewhere out to sea. The next day brought rather a surprise.

*April 23rd.* Clouds down to 500 feet, no good trying to find a way through crevasses to-day. Climbed the bluff behind the hut and found lots of flowers ready to come out. *Saxifraga oppositifolia* is already showing purple buds, while the sedum and salix are beginning to grow. Most of the plants use the protection of last year's foliage to shelter the new shoots and nearly all of them are red when they first come up: I suppose this colour collects heat. Wonderfully warm in the sun: when the sun is shining it is impossible to walk anywhere as you sink in waist-

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

deep, but as soon as the sun sets, and on cold dull days, there is an iron-hard surface. Heard a Ptarmigan call for first time this year: Snow Buntings singing beautifully at dawn, with the tenuous mellow tones of a Blackbird.

Low fog over fjord: I went out to see if there were any seals lying out. Long before I reached the point I found to my amazement a number of cracks, and a measured swell groaning in under the ice, which was swaying gently; I went on, and just beyond the big berg was open water! How incredible at this time of the year! I had taken the fjord-ice for granted; it is just as if one went outside one morning at home and found a rushing river where one's favourite flower-bed had been. Black fog over the water and a fair swell coming in. The ice had not broken back quite as far as the point so I was able to cross over into the branch fjord. There were some cracks here running across, but I could see open water right out to Ailsa when the fog lifted; there was a fresh offshore wind, and as I could see that no ice had broken off lately, I thought it was fairly safe if I kept a good watch. I went out to the edge and waited. The ice was swaying up and down, so I kept an eye on the pack behind me. Soon I saw a seal, whistled it in close, and got it second shot at 80 yards. I was engrossed in watching it and wondering how I could recover it, when I suddenly saw a line of black open water appear across the ice behind me and then disappear again with the swell. I knew what this meant, and picking up my gun, skis and ice-spear I ran like hell. It was already too wide to jump and going out at a great speed—I have often noticed that the impetus of ice breaking off gives it a high initial velocity. I ran along the edge and found I was on a floe about 100 yards long and 20 wide. It crossed my mind as I ran that I hadn't even got any matches with me, though I usually make a point of carrying a box, only seven bullets and thin summer clothes. At one end of my piece of ice I found a triangular bit about

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

five feet along each side, which was half cracked off from the main floe. I jumped on it vigorously, narrowly avoiding falling into the sea when it broke off. I sat on the bit of ice and paddled back with a ski. One has to watch oneself in this country.

Saw two Glaucous Gulls out over the open water. The others were amazed to hear my news. We can't reach our dump by the ice now and will have to go across by boat, or sledge up Jordan Valley and round behind.

Several days were spent digging out the dinghy, which was underneath about 14 feet of snow; meanwhile the open water came to within about half a mile of the Base.

When at last we harnessed both teams to the boat and dragged it out to the edge of the water, so much pack-ice had floated back again that it was quite impossible to reach the branch fjord.

*April 26th.* Fog and low cloud almost every day now. Ready to start at 8 A.M. but John's mad dog Toogie is fat and independent nowadays and refused to be caught. Grand hot day but cumulus clouds forming on the hill-tops. Very slushy going up Jordan Valley. There is a dead glacier here and we can sledge straight up it without even prospecting ahead first. Very crevassed up above but we found a way through.

Reached our dump at 11 A.M. and took enough provisions for a fortnight's trip. The season is so advanced now that we cannot hope to reach Kangerdlugsuak as well as doing the local survey, which, for the Air-Route, is much more important. We are therefore going to sledge from here round behind Nigertusok, if we can, and connect up with the survey we did on the last trip.

All the ice in the branch fjord has now been smashed right up to the glacier in straight-edged pieces 20 or 30 yards in length; they are all skewed round a bit but are touching each other and pressed up by masses of close pack which have come in from the sea. The pack-ice

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

still stretches unbroken to the horizon; there must have been the deuce of a storm to come right through at least 60 miles of pack and break up our fjord-ice. Camped a mile or two up on the glacier just before a belt of crevasses. During the night the ice kept on cracking with a loud report like hammering on an anvil.

*April 27th.* Clouds down to 1,000 feet level. No hope of any work to-day. Snowing a little. Pleasant day lying up. We have to adopt the Eskimo attitude of not worrying about delays and making the best of everything that turns up.

Read *The Vicar of Wakefield* aloud to John: what a different atmosphere from expedition life! Made "deadlies" in the evening. Two of my dogs loose.

*April 28th.* Lay up. Sun shining out to sea. Diffused light up here and mountains hidden. Reading *The Friendly Arctic* again—an encyclopædia of hunting and sledging lore.

*April 29th.* Lay up again. Snowing still. Very comfortable, just eating, reading and sleeping.

*April 30th.* Weather worse, if anything. Visibility 100 yards. We must go home if this weather continues: we are only wasting dog-food. The local survey is the most important and John thinks we should return to the Base on the first fine day, and while the fjord-ice is still good spend ten days mapping Lake Fjord and Nigertusok, then go up behind Nigertusok to connect up with our Kangerdlugsuatsiak survey.

Discussed future plans: John and Quintin will go down to Angmagssalik in the *Stella* as soon as the ice allows. I will stay alone at the Base to keep the meteorological observations, then go to Cape Dan with Enock's crowd to do bird work.

At midday we left our tent standing and set off for the Base. We soon got below the fog and reached the hut at the same time as Kidarsi and his wife, who have come on a

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

visit. Went out to the open water and shot a seal, but it sank at once. For the last ten days half the seals have sunk. . . .

For the next few days Rymill finished the triangulation for his map of the country round Lake Fjord, and then started to fill in the detail with plane table. Riley was very busy painting and varnishing the *Stella* and the whale-boat, and getting them ready for the forthcoming journey to Angmagssalik. The boats had spent the winter under several feet of snow, but as they had been carefully covered with tarpaulins they were none the worse.

When I was not helping Rymill I used to go over to the winter-house and stay there watching birds and hunting seals for dog-food.

Once again spells of bad weather delayed us. In the first fortnight of May it rained almost every day, while low cloud and fog prevented any survey work. When we had another period of good weather Rymill finished the plane tabling he had still to do from the fjord-ice, while I took rounds of photographs to fill in the detail on his map.

By this time, on account of the snow softening in the heat of the day, it was only possible to sledge early in the morning and after sunset. The snow was now leaving all the southern slopes. The rivers broke out from their winter imprisonment and pools of water formed on the sea-ice. Feeling that Nigertusok would not be safe for sledging for many days more, Rymill and I left the Base, intending to sledge up Jordan Valley, pick up our tent, which we hoped was still standing, and then to continue our map eastward, if possible connecting it up with Thank God glacier. We intended to come back down the big glacier in Nigertusok.

*May 17th.* Another glorious day; but as on most days now, high clouds cover the sky about midday and the wind starts to blow. My dogs are faster again though three of them are hardly strong enough to pull their own weight. We crossed the river on the only snow bridge

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

that is still bearing and found most frightful slush in Jordan Valley. The lake is beginning to thaw at the edges. Took a gaunt 10 lb. salmon from the net on the way. Left sledges at top of Jordan glacier and climbed a mountain to see what happens to the glaciers here. Found some huge hunting spiders up on top, and several flowering plants even near the summit of the mountain. A male Snow Bunting flew over us when we were right on top. A simply wonderful view from here right out over the pack-ice for miles and miles, and inland we can recognise many of the mountains we saw on our earlier journeys. Took compass bearings and levels of many points, also rounds of photographs. Grand ski run down. Reached camp after dark. All the pemmican has gone green with mould, and the tent has sunk in about a foot.

*May 18th.* Lay up. Wind blowing hard enough in the night even to drive the crystalline salty snow against the tent wall like gravel. Clouds down over the hills. I read books about the Eskimos and wished I were an anthropologist. Found Salo had eaten his harness in half and run back to the Base. One of Enoch's bitches is leading him astray.

*May 19th.* Fine, but low clouds forming on the hills. Continued mapping. This country is impossible to map without aeroplanes. We feel like a couple of spiders dropped away out on the pack-ice and told to make a map of it. From up here we can see scores of glaciers and plains of crevassed ice four or five miles wide, with mountain ranges on each side, cut up by smaller glaciers and all on different levels. We skied across a valley with an overhanging cornice on both sides, and then up a rocky ridge. We looked down on to Steenstrup's glaciers and across to Cape Gustav Holm further up the coast.

There are six inches of soft salty snow, and the sledge moves forward in a series of jerks. Ski-wax might be

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

good to put on the runners, but we had little success with it in 1930-31. Soon clouded up and started to rain. Stopped to camp because a crevasse suddenly loomed up just in front of us. Torrential rain in the night and snow with violent gusty wind. Both inner and outer tents soaked and almost everything inside. This is an impossible country. I can't think why people ever come here when they could go anywhere else—and yet—.

*May 20th.* Lay up. Blowing all night and still raining like hell. Reading Stephen Leacock, which cheered me up enough to spend some time making plans for future expeditions: but it's about as futile as trying to map this country—plans never seem to come off.

*May 21st.* Lay up. What a spot ! Looks worse than ever now, but the wind has dropped. It was my birthday the other day so I have brought all the wherewithal to make a cake. I took a cupful of flour and a teaspoonful of baking powder and then rubbed a lump of butter into it, added a pinch of salt and a large handful of raisins, mixed it all up into a paste and then put it into a butter tin which I stood on three screws inside one of our cooking pots. With the lid on this makes a grand oven and the cake was quite up to standard after an hour and a half's baking over the Primus, although John found a trouser button in his half, not to mention the usual plague of hairs from the reindeer skins.

*May 22nd.* Lay up. Fried some of our salmon for supper: it has gone a little green on one side but tasted all right. Everything is wet. Our sleeping-bags seem to mop up water through the reindeer-skin and ground sheet. What wouldn't I give for a good hot bath, a shave and then a real dinner.

*May 23rd.* Lay up. This is really getting beyond a joke. Only six days' dog-food left now. The dogs seem quite happy sleeping all day. It's really rather fun lying up, and it doesn't seem to do one any harm being

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

perpetually wet. There is a consoling inevitability about it. You just can't travel and there it is. In England if I spend a whole day reading I have the disquieting feeling that there are a thousand things I ought to be doing. But here there is absolutely nothing else to do.

*May 24th.* Lay up. A patch of sunlight suddenly appeared at 6 A.M. and showed us a very nasty crevasse starting about ten yards in front of the tent—much worse than we had imagined. Didn't feed dogs to-day, to save food. Reading Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. Marvellous book; he has a wonderful understanding of people, but his outlook seems warped somehow. This tent smells vilely and is dripping wet throughout.

*May 25th.* Away at last! Raining hard in early morning. When it cleared we set off to walk up a hill on the side of the glacier. As the sun was shining we spread out our sleeping-bags and skins to dry in the sun. On the rocks I saw a male Greenland Wheatear. Although the mountain is just a barren-looking rock sticking out of the ice, miles from the coast, there are many plants here. Both kinds of cassiope, three kinds of saxifrage, salix, empetrum and dwarf rhododendron, *silene acaulis*, and a small curly fern. Just as we got near the top the rain came on again and we saw nothing at all. It was pouring as we returned to camp to find our sleeping-bags quite soaked. However, it soon cleared again and we have discovered where we are. We are at the north-east end of Salisbury Plain and can recognise the top of Thank God glacier. At 5 P.M. we stopped and skied up a big nunatak (a bit of land surrounded by glacier ice) which had a pleasant snow ridge on one side. Sketched and took photos from the top. We are just at the top of Niger-tusok glacier here and can easily sledge down it to-morrow.

*May 26th.* Clouds came down again and soon a snow-storm enveloped us, but after that it cleared a little and we sledged down the glacier mapping as we went. There is

## DESULTORY SLEDGE JOURNEYS

one thing we haven't done and that is to connect up the North Fjord of Kangerdlugsuatsiak with Nigertusok. We shall have to be quick if we want to do this before the ice breaks up; it is pretty sloppy now and very rotten near the shore.

*May 27th.* Foggy. Returned to Base for dog-food to-day. Most of the snow has left the bit of land between the two fjords, and we sledged for a hundred yards on end over shingle and heath. The Nansen sledges with their wooden runners (we have taken the tin off) go wonderfully well over land, but metal runners will hardly slide at all.

*May 28th.* It's great fun this cross-country sledging. Red-throated Divers fly over us and Ringed Plover and Turnstone get up in front of our dogs. Boiling hot day. There are some big open cracks right across Enock's fjord and places where the ice is spongy and unsafe at midday. We sledged up the edge of the big Nigertusok glacier and found bad going there. All the debris from the glacier is half floating, and the dogs were scared. We followed up a strange gully between the glacier and the land. It was very steep in places. We saw some old bear tracks here. A few days feeding on seal-meat has made all the difference to the dogs, who are now stronger than they ever were.

At one place when we had got up on to the glacier, John's sledge skidded sideways on an icy patch and went down a narrow crevasse. It was rather a job unloading the sledge to extricate it without dropping anything down.

*May 29th.* Cloudy and overcast; a very much crevassed glacier this, but we found a safe way through, then left our sledges and skied up a steep glacier to the west.

It is often urged as an advantage of man-hauling over dogs that you can leave the camp and sledges to go off on foot for a day or two. But if the dogs are given a good meal they will stay perfectly happy for several days on end.

We skied up this glacier for four hours, sometimes roping up to cross large crevasses. At last we reached a

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

col and from there we could see a glacier on a lower level coming down from the north, near the head of Thank God glacier; we could also see right down into the North Fjord of Kangerdlugsuatsiak. Spent some time mapping this and then skied down to our sledges.

Our survey of this damnable mass of glaciers and mountains is now finished, and we will spend what days we have left before the others go to Angmagssalik in continuing the local survey.

On the way home, while I was giving John a hand over a difficult steep bit with many rocks protruding through the snow, my dogs suddenly bolted down the hill. The sledge stuck among some rocks, the leading trace broke, and all the dogs ran off back to Enock's house which they knew was only a mile or two away. I returned with John's sledge and on the fjord we met Nikolay, who was bringing my team back. John went on to the Base while I turned back with Nikolay to collect my sledge. By 9 P.M. the snow had hardened, and on steep places was dangerously fast. So we put on chains and got down all right. Chains have much more effect on frozen snow. Got back at midnight and slept in Enock's tent: they have left the winter-house as it got so wet and smelly.

*Perched on my city office stool,  
I watched with envy, while a cool  
And lucky carter handled ice . . .  
And I was wandering in a trice,  
Far from the grey and grimy heat  
Of that intolerable street,  
O'er sapphire berg and emerald floe,  
Beneath the still, cold ruby glow  
Of everlasting Polar night,  
Bewildered by the queer half-light,  
Until I stumbled unawares,  
Upon a creek where big white bears  
Plunged headlong down with flourished heels,  
And floundered after shining seals  
Through shivering seas of blinding blue.*

W. W. GIBSON

## CHAPTER X

### HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

ON the whole the natives were much disappointed with the winter hunting at Lake Fjord and Nigertusok. From the end of January, when the last lead of open water froze over, till the beginning of April, when the seals started to climb out on to the ice and bask in the sun, the Eskimos got no seals at all.

When there is no open water they have three ways of catching seals: shooting or harpooning them at the breathing-holes, setting nets beneath the ice, and using the long harpoon.

Enock, for some obscure reason, never even tried to take seals at their breathing-holes, and as he hadn't got any string to make nets, or wood for a long harpoon, he never, on his own account, tried any of these hunting methods. He preferred to expend all his spare energy in searching for bears.

Enock admitted that at his home at Cape Dan he usually netted a good many seals each winter, but it was an old man's occupation, he said, and rather a dull one at that. Although seal-nets are mentioned in some of the old East Coast tales, the use of them died out; but they have lately been reintroduced at Angmagssalik by the Danes, who have taught the Greenlanders on the West Coast to use them with great success, even for netting the Beluga whales. As I was keen to learn this way of getting seals I had some nets made when Rymill and I sledged down to Angmagssalik, but by the time we got back to Lake Fjord the ice was so thick everywhere that it was almost impossible to set them. These nets are usually about ten yards long and six or eight feet deep. The mesh should be about seven inches along each

## HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

side, and the string should be dyed so that the seal will not see it. The net is held through holes in the ice by ropes at each end, and, if the net is long, by one in the middle also. It is hung so as to be well clear of the bottom of the ice, and weighted with several quite small stones so that the net will give way as the seal swims into it and then wrap round the animal when it starts to struggle.

The best place for setting the net is across a channel between two islands or off the end of a headland, or even beside an iceberg which is frozen into the level fjord-ice.

I had always imagined that once the fjord froze over, the seals, confined to the areas around their breathing-holes, would no longer be able to travel about. But apparently seals are continually on the move even in the depth of winter, coming up for air in the tide-crack or alongside an iceberg. One Eskimo at Cape Dan netted six seals in a single day, across a channel between a small skerry and an island.

With some difficulty we managed to set two nets in our fjord, but only one small seal was caught in several months.

The long harpoon method, as well as being the most attractive way of catching seals, can under ideal conditions be the most profitable. Karali once caught nine fjord seals in Kingorsuak in one day with a long harpoon. The harpoon itself consists of a light wooden pole, thirty or forty feet long, with a detachable ivory or bear-bone head fixed to a long seal-skin line. The last three inches of the harpoon head are on a pivot, but are held rigid by a seal-skin ring which slides up the shaft when the seal is struck, thus liberating the end portion, which turns crosswise and acts as a barb. Two holes are cut in the ice, a small one to take the harpoon, which is held by one hunter standing on the ice, and a larger one through which the other hunter, lying on the ice, and with his head covered with a skin, can watch every movement of the seal, at the same time guiding the harpoon with one hand. The seal is attracted by the movement of two small pieces of ivory attached by the quill of a bird's feather

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

to the end of the harpoon, and by the strange noises made by the hunter with his lips just clear of the water. All ice particles must be scooped away with a tin from the larger hole; then, as long as the ice is not too thick, everything can be seen with wonderful clearness—the blackened shaft of the harpoon stretching downwards, and then the ivory beads quivering as the harpoon is moved slightly up and down. A few shrimps swim round the mouth of the hole; down below the water is of beautiful translucent green colour. Suddenly out of the corner of your eye you see a seal come swimming into your circle of vision. The other man cannot see it, but he can tell by the movement of your hand, and the sudden tenseness of your body, that the seal is in sight. The seal swims nearer, not as you had imagined always in the same horizontal plane, like a fish, but moving queerly, now straight up in the water supporting its weight on curiously moving flippers, now almost on its back with saucer-like eyes gazing up at the strange shapes on the ice above. His whiskers, the short stiff hairs above his eyes, and the wrinkles of his nose can all be made out. Then he catches sight of those irresistible white objects—entrancingly white in the green and indigo water: he swims down in a graceful curve and comes up to examine them from below. A few bubbles come floating erratically upwards. You follow the movement of the seal with the harpoon. He is directly below the point. "NOW," you shout, and the other man darts the harpoon down with all his force. The seal is caught, the harpoon head comes off the shaft and the seal is hauled in by the line.

Sometimes four seals are seen at once in this hunting method, but so timid are they as a rule that for every six seals seen only one is actually caught.

Ethnologically this method is especially interesting as it is practised nowhere else except in the Angmagssalik district, and even here its use is dying out.

But it was the bear-hunting that really excited Enock and

## HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

Kidarsi. This was their chief incentive in leaving their comfortable wooden house at Cape Dan and coming all the way to Nigertusok. Enock, though one of the best hunters in the district, had only killed twenty bears in his life, while none of the others had got any.

Polar bears are born much further north in Greenland, but on the East Coast, once the pack-ice freezes on to the land, they wander quite a long way south, not only over the sea-ice but by the glaciers too. Sometimes in the summer when the pack breaks up they get carried south against their will, living on what seals they can catch from the floating ice on which they are marooned. In this way bears are sometimes carried right round Cape Farewell and a considerable way up the west coast of Greenland. At Julianehaab, for instance, they told me they got a few bears nearly every year from March till June. Once they get ashore they make their way northward again, walking right up on the Ice Cap and only occasionally coming down to the fjord to hunt seals. As the number of bears usually varies as the amount of pack-ice, the natives were surprised and disappointed that this year there seemed to be so few bears about.

One day in January I was out hunting with the three Eskimo men in Nigertusok, when all at once we noticed something like a man following our tracks a long way behind. Enock put his battered glasses up—"nanotiwuckai!" (A bear. By Jove!) he exclaimed, and we all rushed to our sledges and away at full speed.

The bear, looking very yellow-coloured against the white ice and snow, was lumbering along towards us looking from side to side and stopping every now and then as if he had something on his mind. As long as we ran on snow-covered ice he didn't hear us, but when the leading sledge rattled over a stretch of hard ice which had only recently frozen over, he heard us at once, and turning, started to run up the fjord. Enock was in front, running behind his sledge, and whipping on his eight dogs as hard as they could go.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

As soon as he got on to the tracks of the bear he sat on the sledge, and hauling in two of the dogs by their traces undid the toggles of their harnesses and let them go. At first they seemed bewildered—it was the first bear they had hunted this year—but soon, seeing the tracks, they dashed off at a great speed. Then Enock let another dog go.

Kidarsi and I left the tracks and cut across the fjord to the left, in the direction in which the bear was making. We saw him disappear behind a point of land with the three dogs yapping at his heels. When we caught up we found that the bear had slipped down into the tide-crack, and with only his head showing was growling defiance at the dogs who barked excitedly only a yard or two away. When the dogs got too near, the bear would make sudden lunges at them, coming half out of the water. Sometimes he would dive, rarely staying under water for more than half a minute, to appear again further along the tide-crack.

Enock was afraid that if he shot the bear it might sink, so he harpooned it first, and then shot it in the neck. We pulled the carcase out on to the ice and started to cut it up. It was a fair-sized male, measuring about six feet from nose to tail. There was not much blubber on it, and the stomach only contained some sea-cucumber and the remains of a Brunnich's Guillemot. As soon as we had cut it open Enock removed the liver and carefully pushed it under the tide-crack.

He said that if a man eats bear's liver he gets desperately ill and his hair drops out; dogs are apparently similarly affected. There were some curious old wounds on the armpits of this bear, caused, Enock explained, by the bear breaking his way through thin ice. He swims sideways, pulling himself along with one forepaw below the ice and the other above. Enock tells me that his father once watched a bear catch a seal lying out on thin ice; the bear swam along underneath the ice and suddenly put his head

## HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

up through the hole, much to the consternation of the seal, who now had no way of getting back to the water.

The Eskimo hunting rules regarding a bear are rather interesting. Whoever first sees the bear, whether man, woman or child, has the honour of getting the bear, and possesses the skin. Any hunter who takes part in the chase has a share of the meat. The rules for dividing up the meat are also traditional: the first man in at the kill gets one hind-quarter and the second man the other; the next two get a fore-leg each, while the person who sees the bear has, as well as the skin, the head, ribs and offal. In this case I was given a third part of the meat—a most useful addition to our meagre supply of fresh meat.

As we cut up the bear we ate some of the kidney raw and still warm: it tasted delicious.

On returning to the winter-house, blubber flares were lit in the snow outside and the women took over the rest of the flensing, carefully cutting the skin away from the skull and paws, and then stowing away the larger joints in the up-turned umiak which serves as a winter storehouse till the snow gets so high on the poles supporting it that the dogs can reach inside. In the evening Weedy mena sewed up the nose and ear of one of the dogs who had not been quite quick enough in avoiding the bear's claws. The dog didn't seem to feel the pain at all.

Later on, with the lengthening days of spring, Enock and Kidarsi used to make long journeys right past Lake Fjord and Waal's Fjord as far as Steenstrup's glaciers and once up to Cape Gustav Holm. Sometimes they would leave the winter-house at three in the morning, and if they got on the tracks of a bear it might be midnight or even later before they would be home again.

From February to April the bears all seemed to be working northward, sometimes wandering into the fjords and at other times keeping further out on the sea-ice. The seals at this time of the year have their young in snowy hollows

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

among the pack-ice, and the bear, with his wonderful powers of scent, can find these nurseries and dig down to the helpless seal-cub; the mother meanwhile usually managing to slip back into the sea. We found several places where bears had tunnelled down into the snow, and little piles of bones showing that they were often successful.

One day in February, Enock and Kidarsi were following a bear track northwards when they noticed footmarks and a great deal of scratching in the snow on a headland. It was a hibernating bear. The bears seem to spend most of the winter months in caves they dig out in the snow, often on glaciers or headlands down by the shore, but sometimes away in the mountains. Every now and then they come out and catch a seal, gorge themselves, and then return to their lairs. In this case there was a small breathing-hole about six inches across showing where the bear was. When they poked with their ice-spears to enlarge this hole so that they could shoot, the pole was seized with an irresistibly powerful grip and pulled inside. After they had shot the bear they had the unpleasant task of crawling in through the narrow entrance tunnel to see if it was really dead, and then after cutting it up the heavy carcase had to be sledged fifteen or twenty miles back to Nigertusok.

In the beginning of April when Rymill was busy with the mapping I thought it would be a good idea to try and get Enock and Kidarsi to sledge over to the open water in Kangerdlugsuatsiak to see if we could get any seals or bears. We were very hard up for fresh meat for the dogs at this time, and indeed had little enough for ourselves.

This turned out to be one of the pleasantest trips I have ever made.

*April 10th.* Left the Base at 5 p.m. with only four dogs as the others are really unfit and must rest. I took the *Crashin*. (A small boat I had made to carry on a sledge. It was 6 feet long and 2 feet 3 inches wide at the top, sloping down to 18 inches at the bottom. It was made

## HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

of match-boarding and on the outside had a covering of fjord seal-skin up to the water line. The whole boat weighed only 40 pounds. It was propelled with a kayak paddle.)

I took a light summer tent, and sleeping bags for Enock and Kidarsi.

They were surprised to see me at the winter-house, and are keen to go to-morrow. I slept on the bench between Enock and Nikolay who both snored vilely. Only dog-biscuits for supper; they have finished their last bear but have still six fjord seals and two bearded seals under the snow. I gather they are keeping them in case the spring seal-hunting fails, or because they are too lazy to go and dig them up.

*April 11th.* Up at 4 A.M., away two hours later. Marvellous day and good going. My dogs are very slow from eating too much shark. A seal lying out at the far end of Kangerdlugsuatsiak. Enock hunted it, and after a good stalk hit it in the neck, but it slipped back down the hole. Half-way through the stalk the seal got very restive and waited on the edge of its hole all ready to dive in. However, Enock kept behind the screen for almost ten minutes on end and the seal gradually calmed down again. This cold spell seems to have sent most of the seals below. Plenty of open water here. We spread out, each covering a different pool. Suddenly a young bearded seal came up in the middle pool and assumed its characteristic position with only the top of its head and its back showing. Kidarsi shot it the second time it came up. There was 20 yards of thin ice, and the seal lay another 30 yards beyond in the open water. Enock sat in the *Crashin*, slid out in it over the thin ice, till he went through, then he broke his way out to the open water with his paddle and soon recovered the seal. The boat works beautifully. It was a young bearded seal seven feet long and five and a half feet round the middle. As they wanted the skin for

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

making a harpoon-line they cut round the body twice just below the flippers and above the tail; then they peeled the skin back as a cylinder. To prepare the hunting line they must cut it round and round in a spiral—a very skilled job—stretch the thong, dry it and then soften it. After that it will coil up perfectly in the kayak-stand. The gut of the seal was absolutely full of worms. There were prawns and small flat eels in the stomach; this is the first big seal for five months.

Gave the dogs a real good meal of meat and blubber, then buried the rest in the snow and pulled the *Crashin* over the top. Enock gave each dog a small piece of liver and said that bearded seal's liver was never eaten by the Eskimos as it sometimes has the same effect as bear's liver.

Boiled a good potful of the meat and ate quantities of raw blubber—it tastes just like a mixture of cream and nuts. Cold night—6° F., and a great deal of white rime forming inside the tent. Rather cold in the night; what a difference a double tent makes. Even in this cold weather the natives only wear seal-skin boots, with a seal-skin inner sock and grass between. I don't think that the Eskimos can stand the cold any better than healthy Europeans except in this one respect. The other day when I was out with Nikolay his face froze three times, whereas mine was all right but my feet got very cold.

*April 12th.* I went across to the dump to get some tins of dog-biscuits while the others hunted. As I returned after an hour they came to meet me. Apparently three bears had passed within 30 yards of the tent in the night, and at this moment were sleeping in the sun on the far side of the open water!

We kept very quiet as they hear every sound. It seemed to be a unique chance to get a film of bear-hunting, so I got the Eskimos to wait while I sledged round with my camera and got fairly near under cover of an ice-

## HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

berg. The three bears, two fairly young ones with their mother, were lying out on rather thin ice beside the open water. Every few minutes the mother raised herself on her forepaws and stretching her sinuous neck in the air sniffed for danger. The other two had sledged up quite near before she saw them. She then ran off fast down the fjord—alas ! away from me—with the cubs following. The ice was so thin that the larger cub actually went through, but scrambled out again in a moment. The mother had stopped to see if he was all right, and by that time the four dogs that Enock and Kidarsi had loosed caught her up. She turned to face them while the cubs made their escape. The dogs all got wildly excited, and one of them actually hung on to her instead of leaping back out of reach as they usually have the sense to do. When the sledges came up the drivers were unable to stop the dogs, who all went straight for the bear, bodily driving her back. The ice was very thin here and I could see it swaying all the time. After they had shot the bear the Eskimos covered the carcase with spare clothing so that the skin wouldn't spoil in the sun. They also tied it up to an ice-spear, stuck in the firmer ice, in case it went through. Meanwhile the two cubs made a circuit across the fjord and started to follow their tracks of the night before, up towards the head of the fjord.

We ran for two miles—small bears are very much faster than large ones—and then we had a check. The cubs, followed by two dogs even more game than the others, had gone straight up a glacier so steep that it was impossible for us to follow. The bears had a good start on us, but by the incessant yapping of the dogs coming from higher up the glacier it sounded as if one of them was at bay. How they got up this slope of hard snow and ice at about  $60^{\circ}$ , not to mention the crevasses, I can't imagine.

With my knee I thought I'd better not climb up, so watched the others go round an easier way. They shot

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

one there but the other did a magnificent rock climb and got away. Good for it! It went straight up a snowy crag up which I should never have thought any animal could climb.

In the old days when they killed bears with lances (as they still do from kayaks) bear-hunting must have been quite exciting. But this is just butchery.

Enock and Kidarsi harnessed the odd dogs to the carcase, dragged it across the glacier and then let it slide down the five hundred or so feet to the bottom.

These bears had apparently come down the main glacier at the fjord head. We found a place where the mother had caught a seal in a crack at the foot of a small glacier, and beside it a little pile of nails which had been carefully extracted from the flippers.

We harnessed all three sledges to the big bear and dragged it bodily back to camp. Ravens have been at it but not done much harm. It took a long time to skin them both. In the stomach of the mother we found seven seal-flippers—several from full-grown fjord seals, and a great quantity of skin and blubber. I suppose she gave the meat to the cubs.

Gave the dogs a large meal of bear-meat. It's quite amazing how much they can put down. . . .

Next day we crossed several tracks on the way back to the Base but saw no sign of any more bears, which was just as well, seeing that our sledges had as big loads as they could conveniently carry over the uneven pack-ice.

Hunting with the shooting-screen is usually the most profitable of all the various methods of seal-hunting. From about the second week in April when seals first started to lie out on top of the ice enjoying the warmth of the spring sun, till the ice became rotten, we got almost as many seals as we could do with. Although some individual seals were so unsuspicious that they hardly looked up at all as one stalked them, others would go down at once unless every

## HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

precaution was taken. The wind must blow from the seal towards the hunter; the sun should not be directly behind him, or a hard shadow will be thrown on the hunting-screen. The most difficult thing is not to make any noise; the hot sun melts the snow on top of the ice and then the night frost puts a brittle crust on this thaw water which cracks noisily underfoot even if one stalks on skis. Following the native example I found it was much easier to approach seals with bare feet—though it was rather cold work. Once a seal that I had shot slipped back into the water and sank, but I could see it “floating” in the water ten feet below. Apparently the layer of fresh water on the surface could not support it, but once it reached the salty layer it sank no further. We recovered this seal with a weighted fish-hook.

Sometimes we saw a silky white seal-cub on the ice beside its mother.

In May the fjord seals started to moult, and as one stalked them they would be continually scratching themselves and rolling over, sometimes sleeping on their backs, when they would be much easier to approach. The male seals, at this time of the year, have a strong musky smell which even taints the meat.

When the ice in Lake Fjord broke up, towards the end of April, one could still travel by jumping from floe to floe as all the pieces were pressed together by the force of the pack outside. It is possible to sledge across this sort of going, but as either the dogs or the sledge are continually going into the water, it is better to leave the sledge at the edge of the ice and to walk.

It was at this time that the big bearded seals would occasionally be found lying out on quite small floes: I never saw one out on the large expanses of fjord-ice which the smaller seals favoured. Bearded seals are fairly easy to approach when lying out, as they look up much less often than the fjord seals. They can be recognised from afar, as, after looking round, they let the head and neck subside slowly

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

on to the ice instead of dropping it quickly as the small seals do: also they rarely lie out far from the shore.

When the Eskimos have at last crawled within shot of a fjord seal, as they are lying on the ice and about to shoot, they clap their feet together to make the seal look up at the critical moment. But if you do this with a bearded seal he will slide back into the water at once. To make him look up you must make a low "eeeeeee" noise, as if in pain.

As soon as there was enough open water for them, the migrant birds started to arrive. There were two Glaucous Gulls by the open water in Kangerdlugsuatsiak on April 11th, but the temperature was  $-5^{\circ}\text{F}$ . and they sat huddled up and disconsolate on the edge of the ice. Next day they had gone.

Small parties of Snow Buntings reached the Base in the middle of April, and by the end of the month most of the males had claimed territories and were singing vigorously all day and most of the night. The Greenland Wheatears did not come till the beginning of May. On May 2nd, at Nigertusok, a Redpoll flew over calling, a pair of Purple Sandpipers followed the tide-crack and several Black Guillemots swam around in a pool of open water. Each day several Glaucous Gulls scavenged round the shark-hole, and sometimes Greater Black-backed Gulls joined them too, much to the delight of the natives, who were by now hungry for boiled seagull. On May 7th we saw a flock of about 70 geese—probably Pink-footed Geese—flying northwards. A week later the first drake Eider appeared, and the next day a Mallard was flying round above the open water.

By the middle of May it really seemed like spring. Mosquitoes and blue-bottles were buzzing about in the blazing sunshine, flowers were coming out on the southern snow-free slopes and the natives were preparing to move into their tent, as the winter-house was leaking badly and streams of water flowed across the floor.

## HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

The next week Rymill and I spent up on the glacier, and when we returned at the end of May we found that White Wagtails, Ringed Plover, Turnstone and Red-throated Divers had come, while up in the hills the exquisitely lovely *Rhododendron lapponica*—the most beautiful of all the Greenland flowers—was in flower, with its sweet scent and masses of pink blossom.

Enock carried his kayak out over the fjord-ice, and launching it beyond paddled out to Ailsa and returned with the news that leads were appearing right along the shore.

In Nigertusok they saw several narwhals which excited them very much. The narwhal, on account of its ivory tusk, is almost as much sought after as the bear. As soon as the ice breaks up at the mouths of the fjords the narwhals appear and swim round quite near the edge of the ice, but they are very difficult to capture as they are the most timid of all the sea mammals, and usually sink when shot.

Sometimes the natives can harpoon them from the edge of the ice and then shoot them when they come up again to breathe, but as a rule they are harpooned from the kayak.

Kangerdlugsuatsiak is a famous place for narwhals and Enock intended to go and camp there, with his whole family, as soon as the shore lead would allow him to row his umiak round.

It was always difficult to follow their plans, as they rarely made them and still more rarely kept them, but we gathered that the natives would stay there for a time and then continue southwards to their home at Cape Dan. Enock was rather anxious to get back there as soon as possible because the bladder-nosed seal-hunting would now be in full swing.

At the beginning of June it was already like summer and the kayaking season started. I spent all my spare time practising rolling my kayak with Nikolay, as I hoped to spend several weeks kayaking with the Eskimos at Cape Dan once Rymill and Riley should return from Angmagssalik.

*June 1st.* John has a touch of snow-blindness to-day.

A Dunlin flew over me on the way down to the boats.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

Quintin is busy varnishing the *Stella*. Looking after the boats on an expedition is almost a full-time job. A glorious day. Rolled my kayak with Nikolay. I can come up with the throw-stick now but not yet with hand alone. Once my paddle slipped out of my hand when I was trying the throw-stick; of course I failed to come up, and not having the paddle had to be rescued by Nikolay. It's an awfully helpless feeling, hanging upside down in the water! We put the fishing-net down in the river mouth to-day; Quintin had been busy mending it for the last few days.

Nikolay, in his three seasons' kayaking, has capsized accidentally five times: once, in a heavy sea, when he was carrying two seals home on deck—he had to be rescued then as the seals were tied on and preventing him rolling; twice when he was pushing his way through thick ice and the paddle slipped; once when he was out in a very big sea off Cape Dan, and again when he harpooned a Greenland seal and the harpoon-line caught on the end of his paddle as it ran out: in both the last two cases he managed to come up again by his own efforts.

After supper Nikolay and I decided to try to reach the main fjord and shoot some Black Guillemots as we are hungry for birds again.

There is still a belt of rotten ice right across the fjord for about a quarter of a mile. We got out on to this and walking carefully on skis pulled our kayaks behind us on lines. I saw three Teal—two drakes and a duck—settled on a piece of ice. These are the first Teal I have ever seen in Greenland.

We got into our kayaks on the other side of the ice, then paddled across to the glacier. Only saw one seal. Heard the strange soft call of drake Eiders and came upon five drakes and three ducks courting. If you crouch low behind the hunting-screen and take long slow strokes, holding the paddle right at the end, you can

## HUNTING ON THE POLAR PACK

be absolutely invisible as you stalk, but it takes a lot of practice. The Eiders got away.

There are hundreds of Black Guillemots preparing to nest in some basalt dykes on the far side of the fjord. They were in small parties swimming about between the ice-floes. We shot about 20 each, but it took some time as they are rather wary. I used a 16 bore. I saw a pair of Common Scoter ducks out here; I think this is the first record for East Greenland. They were very shy, but I distinctly saw the yellow knob on the drake's beak. There is very much pack-ice here and it is moving all the time with the tide. Saw five Long-tailed Ducks flying round Ailsa. On the way back over the ice I went right through up to my shoulders, much to the amusement of the others who were watching at the time from the hut. Leah is very sick from eating too much putrid shark-meat.

About this time we started making preparations for our return to England. The *Gertrud Rask* would call at Angmagssalik sometime at the end of July or the beginning of August, and though we hoped to be able to persuade the authorities in Denmark to let her come up to Lake Fjord again we knew this would be rather expensive; and in any case she would only be able to come if the ice permitted. Accordingly we thought it best that the *Stella* should take as much luggage as possible to Angmagssalik, where Rymill and Riley would make plans for our return to Europe. It might be necessary for us to leave our Base on their return, taking the rest of our gear with us to pick up the ship at Angmagssalik.

On June 5th all the natives came over from the settlement and we pulled the *Stella* down to the edge of the river so that she would float on the next spring tides. Enock was depressed because the pack-ice was taking so long to disperse: he was eagerly looking forward to hunting narwhal in Kangerdlugsuatsiak.

Now that the fjord-ice had broken up all the seals seemed

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

to have gone away, and the natives, having kept none in reserve, had now run out of fresh seal-meat and were living on birds. However, they managed to get away a few days later—except for Nikolay who had signed on as crew to the *Stella*, since two men would hardly be enough to work the boat if the ice conditions should be as bad as we expected.

On June 12th a short run in the *Stella* showed that the ice was navigable along the shore at any rate as far as Kangerdlugsuatsiak. Next day the *Stella* left for Angmagssalik.

*All true wisdom is only to be found far from the dwellings of men, in the great solitudes ; and it can only be attained through suffering. Suffering and privation are the only things that can open the mind of man to that which is hidden from his fellows.*

Igjugarjuk, of the Caribou Eskimos  
(from KNUD RASMUSSEN)

## CHAPTER XI

### A MONTH ALONE

WHEN you come to consider it there are comparatively few people who have ever spent twenty-four hours on end without seeing or speaking to another human being. I had certainly never tried the experiment, and was therefore very interested to see how I would like it when the other two went southward in the *Stella*, and I was left to spend a whole month completely isolated from the rest of the world.

At first I welcomed the idea of being completely and gloriously free. True, I had a good deal of work to do, but I could choose my own time for that as long as I was ready at 10 A.M., 4 P.M., and 10 P.M. to do the meteorological work.

It seemed wonderful to be bound by no conventions: I could eat whenever I felt hungry, and as there was continuous daylight I was not even obliged to sleep at night. So to begin with I led a completely Bohemian existence. I would cook enough food to last me for a week, then if I felt inclined I would have several meals a day, though often I only wanted one; if I felt very tired I slept all day, but on the other hand I might pass several days without going to bed at all.

Whether it was the impossibility of breaking down the acquired habits of so many years, or for some more obscure reason, I do not know, but I soon found this irregular existence most unsatisfactory: I was never quite sure how hungry I was, and while sometimes I found I had grossly overeaten, at other times, in the middle of a long walk, I would suddenly feel quite faint from lack of food. The same uncertainty resulted from my desultory way of sleeping, so that after a few days I was fain to return to more or less normal hours.

## A MONTH ALONE

Another experiment was much more successful. I had long wanted to find out the effect on my general health of living entirely on a meat diet; and with no one to distract me by eating other delicacies, this seemed an ideal opportunity for such a trial. When staying with the Eskimos and living as they do I have always found it very difficult to eat cold seal-meat first thing in the morning, though I could do as well as any of them after a long day's hunting; but here, with a variety of different forms of meat—Eider Ducks, Guillemots, and as much fresh salmon and seal-meat as I wanted, this difficulty did not arise. In fact one of my chief troubles was that I got so much food that I did not know what to do with it all, for in Greenland it always seems especially wicked to waste good meat. I allowed myself tea, without sugar or milk, to drink, otherwise I kept to my meat diet for three weeks, and only gave it up because I felt so boisterously well that I was continually taking more exercise than was good for my knee.

As soon as the ice broke up at the mouth of the lake—which it did a month before the rest of the lake-ice melted—we had set the net just where the river flows out. Oddly enough the fish we caught there had apparently already been down to the sea and back again: they were all in fine condition, and had sea-lice on their gills and mouths. As the catch from the lake soon diminished I carried the net down and set it across the river at the head of the fjord. Here I would catch about ten fish every day, of an average weight of 2 lb., though sometimes they would go up to 10 or even 12 lb. These salmon were all bright silver and green in colour and very different from the ugly looking fish we had netted in the lake during the winter. Where the net was, the river was about three feet deep at low tide, and very swift; as I used to get unpleasantly cold wading in to collect the fish, I found it more convenient to use the *Crashin*. One day this led to rather a frightening experience. I was out in the middle of the river, balancing this

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

rather unstable boat and at the same time trying to take a very large salmon from the net. The *Crashin* was held against the net by the swift current, so that I had both hands free to extricate the fish which was struggling hard. Suddenly it gave an extra violent wriggle and opened its mouth as if to bite me. In a moment I had turned completely upside down in the *Crashin* and was swept into the net beneath the water. If the river had been much deeper I am sure I should have been drowned; as it was it took me a good five minutes to get clear of the net. It struck me as I struggled that it would be rather a shock for the others on their return to find me in the fishing-net!

I split most of these fish, salted them, and hung them up in the sun to dry; but it was difficult to keep the flies away, so I decided to try smoking them.

I built a tunnel of stones and sods about eight yards long ending in a large wooden box, with a lid of sacking, in which I could hang the fish. The local peaty earth and empetrum foliage made excellent fuel. I soon discovered that there was more in the art of smoking salmon than I had thought. When I went to examine the first lot I found only the backbones of the fish hanging in a neat row: I had made too great a fire; the meat had cooked and fallen from the bones.

Next day I found that two of the dogs, discovering a nice warm sheltered place, had gone to sleep on top of my fire and had put it out. At last I found the best way was to soak the fish overnight in a very strong brine solution, and then to smoke them for several days over a slow fire.

There were so many fish in the fjord at this time that I could shoot them with a .22 rifle as they broke the surface of the water; but when I tried for them with a rod they refused fly, minnow and spoon, so that the only way I could catch any was to foul-hook them.

At first it seemed to me that having already lost our leader it would be foolish of me to hunt alone in my kayak. But as I was very loath to lose such a good chance of gaining

## A MONTH ALONE

experience, I came to the conclusion that if I discarded the hunting-line and float—the chief source of danger to a novice—and took absolutely no unnecessary risks, then I could go out with impunity in fine weather.

I divided my day up like this: I would wake up at 9 A.M., cook my breakfast, which consisted of fried seal-liver or salmon, then get the washing-up done and the house cleaned in time for the ten-o'clock observation. On fine days I would go out in my kayak from ten to four. After the four-o'clock observation I would have a large meal of roast Eider Duck or seal-meat, and then I did odd jobs till it was time for the evening observation: there was a hole in the whale-boat which wanted repairing, and all the old paint had to be scraped off; a stand was needed for the kayaks so that we would not have to carry them all the way from the hut when the spring tide left a quarter of a mile of muddy fore-shore; the house needed a complete spring-cleaning—the loft, for instance, had not been turned out since the house was built; both my cinema cameras had broken down and had to be completely taken to pieces and repaired; I had many bird-skins to prepare as well as insects and plants to collect. After the evening observation I used to read and write till it was time to go to bed: oddly enough the book that gave me most pleasure was Sir William Rothenstein's *Men and Memories*: perhaps in very contrast to my primitive way of life, where my chief occupation was hunting to get enough food for myself, I found it doubly attractive to share the intimate thoughts and opinions of such men as Conrad, James Stephens and Hudson. The study of the weather is in itself extraordinarily interesting, especially in the peculiar island of Greenland. Meteorology has a great advantage over other sciences in that you can be quite a useful observer without having the very specialised training which is needed by the men at the Meteorological Office who work out the results, in the form of one or two neatly tabulated log-books, that we bring back.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

Our equipment consisted of a standard mercury barometer and a barograph in the living-room of the hut; then outside, in the Stevenson screen (an openwork wooden box) were a thermograph and hydrograph, four thermometers—wet and dry bulb, and also maximum and minimum; then a short distance away a cup anemometer for gauging the force of the wind. There was also a nephoscope, to be used on suitable occasions, for calculating the speed of the clouds.

If there had been plenty of open water the other two would not have been away for more than a week or ten days, but the pack-ice seemed to close in even more after they had gone, and I realised that they would be absent for several weeks. When the *Stella* went in mid-June, the shore lead, between the rocky coast and the still unbroken pack, was just navigable; but as the pack-ice gradually loosened up further out from the shore, the ice-floes drifted back and closed up this lead. For the last two weeks of June, looking down from the hills on to the sea, it appeared quite impossible to get a boat even along the shore lead. So thick was the ice that it was only occasionally, till the beginning of July, that I could even reach Ailsa in my kayak; and as a rule the pack-ice came crowding into the fjord to within a quarter of a mile of the hut. Out beyond Ailsa the pack-ice still stretched unbroken to the horizon; it was not till July 8th that any leads appeared there, and it was the very end of July before several large icebergs, by which I used to mark the movement of the pack, at last started to drift southward.

The presence of this immense area of ice had considerable effect on the weather. Throughout June the temperature never rose above 50° F., and as a rule it was between 30° and 40° F. There were a good many rainy days and snow actually fell on one or two occasions. Even on clear sunny days a bank of low fog would creep in at the fjord mouth in the early evening and completely envelop the Base up

## A MONTH ALONE

to a height of 500 or 600 feet. It would often be midday before the warmth of the sun had dispersed this icy mist.

One day I walked over by the lake to Nigertusok and saw that the ice over that fjord too was so thick that it would have been difficult to find ten square yards of open water. The ice in the lake, augmented in thickness by the heavy snows and rains of early spring, did not finally melt till the beginning of July. The streams flowing in at the western end melted about half of the ice, but as the prevailing wind was from the east, pieces of ice, broken from the main sheet, came drifting over the open water making it precarious for aircraft to land. By the shore of the lake I saw a Barnacle Goose—a bird which had not yet been found nesting south of Scoresby Sound. But although I made several visits to the lake I never saw but this one bird, and soon it too went away.

There were extraordinarily few seals about in the fjord, probably because there was so much ice. I do not suppose I saw more than thirty all the time I was alone at the Base. Of these I managed to capture seven from my kayak.

To make up for the absence of line and float, I tied my harpoon head back on to the middle of the shaft, so that if I harpooned a seal the wooden shaft would act to a certain extent as a float.

It is extraordinarily difficult for a European to learn to throw the harpoon with accuracy, and although I used to spend hours practising throwing at a lump of cork, I could rarely hit the seal if it was any distance from my kayak.

When the young seals first start to go about on their own they are very timid. They come up, usually under an overhanging ice-floe, and watch you with only the top of the head above water. If they dive again before you can shoot, you must keep up a continuous tapping with the paddle on the front of the kayak-ring; then the hollowed sound produced will so frighten, or possibly fascinate, the seal that it will come up again quite near, probably under the same piece

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

of ice. You then shoot with a shot-gun—if you use a rifle it will sink at once. While the seal is thrashing about unconscious in the water you must paddle up close enough to harpoon it. In this way I secured several seals.

One large fjord seal I shot with a rifle in shallow water, and then when it sank I dragged the bottom with weighted cod-hooks and eventually recovered it. I never succeeded in harpooning a seal without having wounded it first with a shot-gun or rifle, but as a good many Eskimo hunters have never done this I could not complain.

The most difficult thing for a lone kayak-hunter to do is to kill and secure the seal when once it has been harpooned, and I had several narrow escapes from capsizing when struggling with a wounded seal which had not only been harpooned but hit twice with the lance. I dare not shoot it then for fear it would sink and take my harpoon down with it.

Storing all this meat was one of my greatest problems: as I expected the *Stella*, or some of the Eskimos, to arrive as soon as the ice allowed, I wanted to have plenty of food in hand. Though I thought Enock would probably be at Cape Dan by this time, he had promised to come back and visit me if he could. I had the bright idea of making a refrigerator by tying up an ice-floe which was stranded near the hut at low water, and then chopping a hole in it to hold the seal-meat and salmon. But this was not a success as the floe split in half and all the meat disappeared. After that I built a stone larder, replenishing it every day with new ice.

One day when I was out hunting, I landed on the south side of the fjord and was surprised to find the remains of three ancient Eskimo winter-houses. Nothing remained except rough banks, overgrown with luxuriant vegetation, showing where the house-walls and entrance tunnels used to be. At the mouth of the fjord, on a narrow strip of grass-covered foreshore, with the rocky mountains rising almost straight up behind for two thousand feet, there were more

## A MONTH ALONE

ruins: the overgrown house-walls of another six dwellings, and a great many graves and stone caches for meat. The graves consisted of a small space, built in neatly with heavy boulders, in which the mouldering skeletons of as many as four or five bodies lay together.

I examined these graves to see if I could find any ethnological specimens, for in the old days tradition required that some belongings of the deceased person, or miniatures of the same, should be buried with him. In one grave I found a beautifully made model of a soap-stone blubber-lamp and a cooking pot. In another there was a spoon wrought from the shoulder-blade of a bear, part of a fishing leister, and a carved piece of wood for plugging a harpoon wound in a seal.

These relics, together with a number of different ethnological specimens collected on this and the previous expedition by Rymill, are now in the Ethnological Museum at Cambridge.

At first I was a little lonely, especially when the weather was bad: it was very difficult to settle down to any job, and I found myself continually scanning the mouth of the fjord for any sign of a boat. It seemed so strange to have no one to talk to or laugh with; and the silence became almost oppressive. But after a time I really got to enjoy the feeling of independence and freedom and would have been quite happy alone for the rest of the summer—though I must admit I should have hated to be alone when the nights grew dark again.

In December, when Rymill and Riley went off to try and sledge up Jordan glacier, I was alone for just one night before Enock and Weedy mena came over to keep me company. I had put out the light and was just starting to go to sleep when there was a loud irregular knocking on the wall of the hut. I sat up in my bunk, horribly afraid. What on earth could it be? A bear, or some still stranger visitor? There was dead silence for a minute, then it started again: Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! It was impossible to think of sleep-

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

ing till I had solved this mystery. I lit the candle in the hut and then cautiously crept out of the door with a loaded rifle. At first I could not make out what had caused the noise; then I saw that one of the hard-runner sledges had been left leaning up against the wall of the hut, and that one of the dogs was pulling at some seal-skin lashing on the sledge so that the handle-bars were beating a tattoo on the wall.

On the afternoon of June 13th, when I had been exactly a month alone, I looked out of the window and saw a boat rowing down the fjord. "Ah," I thought, "they have damaged the propeller in the ice and have had to row the *Stella* home: that's why they've taken such a long time." But at that moment Enock and Kidarsi, who had come on ahead in their kayaks, passed the window, and I realised it was the umiak returning and not the *Stella*.

*Those things all passed away as a shadow, and as a message that runneth by : as a ship passing through the billowy water, whereof, when it is gone by, there is no trace to be found, neither pathway of its keel in the billows : or as when a bird flieth through the air, no token of her passage is found, but the light wind, lashed with the stroke of her pinions, and rent asunder with the violent rush of the moving wings, is passed through, and afterwards no sign of her coming is found therein.*

*The Book of Wisdom, Chapter V*

## CHAPTER XII

### STRANGE MEETINGS

AS soon as Enock and Kidarsi had come in to the hut I began to fire questions at them.

“Have you seen the motor-boat?”

“No. Not for some time. Rymill and Riley reached our camp at Sartermie, but the ice was impassable beyond, and they had to wait there for a good many days.”

“Is the ice good enough for them to get back now?”

“Perhaps.”

“How many narwhal have you got?”

“None.”

“Didn’t you see any?”

“Yes, but very few. The fjord was crammed with brash-ice from the glaciers, and has only recently cleared. I saw two black narwhal one day and got quite near. I was actually raising my harpoon when they dived. Another time I saw a pale-coloured narwhal—as white as ice—swimming along with a baby one just by its tail. I threw my harpoon but it failed to hold.”

“Did Kidarsi see any?”

“Yes, but he had just fitted a new ivory hook (to take the hole in the end of the throw-stick) and hadn’t had time to test its accuracy. He missed too, alas, and that’s all we saw the whole time.”

“Did you get many seals?”

“No, very few. I have never known such a scarcity of seals. We only got eight fjord seals and two bearded seals between us all the time.”

“Do you mean to say that that is all the ten of you have lived on for the last month?”

“Well, we shot some birds and got any amount of

## STRANGE MEETINGS

‘quenie’ (*Archangelica officinalis*—an umbelliferous plant) from the head of the fjord. They grow just beside your food dump. We were rather tempted to take some dog-biscuits from the dump, but we didn’t.”

“ You must all be very hungry now.”

“ Yes, we haven’t tasted seal-meat for a week.”

“ Did you have a comfortable camp at Sartermie ? ”

“ Fairly, but the mosquitoes were terrible. I have never known them so bad. The women folk were all frightfully bored as we got so few seals that they hadn’t any sewing to do. Ah ! Here’s the umiak.”

We went down to the shore and unloaded the umiak, then pulled it ashore and turned it upside down to dry on the rocks. After that all eleven of us (Nikolay was with Rymill and Riley) sat down to a steaming bowl of seal-meat. I must say it gave me the greatest satisfaction to be able to feed a whole family of Eskimos on their own food in their own country. After the meal we put the table on one side and danced till midnight with no pauses except to change the records, and occasionally the needle on the gramophone. It is extraordinary how fond the Eskimo girls are of dancing.

After that Enock took his drum, and sitting on my bunk—he had eaten far too much to stand up and do the proper dances—he put the drum against his cheek and tapping it gently sang quietly to himself—and anyone who cared to listen—for three hours on end.

The Eskimos love to sing—whether it is the petting songs that are sung to the baby carried on its mother’s back, the traditional berry-picking and hunting songs, or the more serious drum-contests. In the Angmagssalik district the very word to sing is the same as to breathe.

Knud Rasmussen quotes old Kilime, Weedymera’s father, as having said “ all songs are born in man, out in the great waste. Now they come to us crying, deep from the anguish of the heart, now as gay laughter, sprung from the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

joy which one cannot help feeling at life and the beautiful countries of the world. Though we do not know how, they come with breath, words and tones, which are not everyday speech, and they become the property of the person who knows how to sing to others.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the favourite songs, well known to every Eskimo in this district, though with local variations, is the one about the Raven. Here is a translation from Enock’s version:

A Raven fell in love with a goose, and in the autumn when the geese were about to depart the Raven set off too. After a time he grew weary, and being afraid to alight on the sea, persuaded the geese to settle down together on the water so that he could land on their backs. But at the critical moment the geese moved apart and he went into the water. As he sinks he sings this song:

*Oh, I am sinking,  
Come and help me,*

(Then follow various exclamations.)

*The water has already reached my feet.*

This song has many verses as the water gradually rises to the Raven’s ankles and knees, until finally he sinks altogether.

The Eskimo tales are delightfully inconsequent: they are full of repetitions and irrelevant details which have nothing to do with the story. Here is the translation of an old tale that Enock loved to tell. I wrote it down in my diary at the time, but as my knowledge of Eskimo grammar is very rudimentary I have preferred to copy the translation of Talbitzer, a trained ethnologist, who spent a winter at Angmagssalik in 1906–7.<sup>2</sup>

Qasiattak, the great liar, who could never catch seals, dwelt in a house with his relatives. He went out hunting in his kayak, while the women went out for a walk to pick berries. Then Qasiattak seated himself in his kayak and

<sup>1</sup> Knud Rasmussen, *Myter og Sagn*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Meddelelser om Gronland*, Vol. xxxix. Part II.

## STRANGE MEETINGS

rowed in towards the shore. He went ashore, fastened his hunting bladder securely to a stone with a skin cord, then went out to sea. When he came home he hid himself, made his hunting bladder burst and sank it. Then when Qasiattak came home he said: "I have lost my hunting bladder" (i.e. a big seal took it down after being harpooned). His housemates believed him at first, for an old man like Qasiattak does not usually lie.

When the women came home from berry-picking, people said to them: "Qasiattak has lost his hunting bladder on a bearded seal." The women said: "We saw Qasiattak row in toward shore and bind his hunting bladder, make it burst and sink it in the sea." Qasiattak's wife said: "What am I to hear? you have lied atrociously. You sank your hunting bladder yourself, didn't you?" Qasiattak was ashamed, and flying up, frightened his wife. From that time his wife ceased believing him; when he wished to row out, he pretended that he wanted to catch seals.

The women who went out to pick berries again saw Qasiattak row ashore. He let his kayak run hard aground, crushed it, filled it with ice from a hummock. Then he went up a steep mountain side and tumbled down, went up again and again tumbled down. Down there, when he had come down, he seated himself in his kayak and rowed off. "Eh, eh, eh!" (the danger-signal is heard). Someone cried, one who has nearly killed himself, destroyed himself by breaking all his bones. He was on his way home; people said: "Qasiattak is coming, shrieking aloud. What is the matter with him?"

Qasiattak told: "An iceberg nearly burst asunder on me!" Qasiattak's housemates said: "Qasiattak, were you indeed nearly killed?" He answered: "Yes, I was almost dead." When they who had been out picking berries came home, the housemates told them: "An iceberg burst asunder on top of Qasiattak." The berry-pickers said: "Qasiattak destroyed his kayak." One asked them: "Did

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

you see it?" "We saw him hurl his kayak against a great stone and fill it with pieces of ice. After he had climbed up a steep mountain side he tumbled down." "You have lied atrociously, Qasiattak." He frightened his wife. Ashamed of having frightened his wife, he sang drum-songs.

Now Qasiattak lay dying, and his countrymen wished that he might soon recover. They heard that the little son belonging to some other people was dead. When Qasiattak heard this, he carved a doll, made a child for his wife.

Qasiattak went off on a visit, and when he reached the place where the visit was to be made, he said: "My wife has chosen your little child's name: she has given the name to our newborn child." (It was customary to name a child after a dying or dead person, then the character of the deceased would be imparted to the recipient of the name.) The old man said: "Thanks be to her, that was kindly done by her." Qasiattak said: "You must be sure to come and see your little child's namesake!" They gave him (as gifts on account of the name) meat and a knife and a hide. Qasiattak said: "She shall have that for a new anorak."

When Qasiattak came home one of his housemates said: "From whom do those things come?" Qasiattak answered: "From the eldest among our fjord-neighbours—my name-gifts." The following day when the fjord-neighbour's eldest arrived, he said: "Let me see your newborn child!" Then they showed it to him. When the visitor saw it he began to weep because it was not a real human being.

When he had departed Qasiattak's wife turned to him: "Now you have been lying as usual." Qasiattak frightened his wife. Qasiattak sang a drum-contest song, when he was reminded of the fact that he had lied and said he had a child. The end. Now the winter is that much shorter.

We had the greatest difficulty in learning the East Coast dialect, as the Eskimos, especially the older ones, never seemed to help us much. Enock, indeed, always laughed

## STRANGE MEETINGS

uproariously at our mistakes, and with the exception of hunting terms rarely taught us much. I remember Riley was once trying to learn the tenses of the verb from Leah—who was extraordinarily stupid and obstinate when it suited her. “To-day the sun shines,” said Riley. Leah gave him the word for that. “To-morrow the sun *will* shine”: again she gave him the word—though it sounded exactly the same. Now, said Riley, “*Yesterday*, the sun shone. How do you say that?” “No,” said Leah, “you are talking rubbish. It was snowing hard all yesterday.” And Riley had to leave it at that.

The natives here laugh very much when they hear the speech of a Greenlander from the West Coast, which is full of clicks and guttural sounds which are alien to the Angmagssalik language. The latter resembles a child’s way of speaking: all the endings are slurred and difficult sounds are avoided. The Greenland language, like their ornamental art and their way of thinking, consists in a bringing together of isolated and independent ideas. They start off with a basic word, and then by a series of affixes build it up to indicate the required meaning. For instance, *Egaluk* in the Greenland language means a salmon: add an affix meaning large and it becomes *eqalug-ssuq*, a shark; another affix and it becomes *eqalugssuar-niar*, shark fishing, and so on till “we have, properly speaking, been forcibly bidden to go out shark fishing” is *eqalugssuarniariartor-qussaugaluqaqau-gut*. All the syllables are affixes, but the last *-gut* is an ending indicating the first person plural.

The word *pular-fi-gi-niar-pa-vti-git*, we intended to pay you a visit, is built up of the stem *pular*, to be a guest; *-fik*, place; *-ga*, have to; *-niar*, intends to; the verbal characteristic *-pa*, and the affixes for the first person plural and second person singular.<sup>1</sup>

For everyday subjects like the different kinds of ice, the

<sup>1</sup> These examples are taken from Schultz-Lorentzen, *Greenland*, vol. ii.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

weather, and the degrees of personal relationship, the Greenlanders have a multitude of different words, but on the other hand their language is very poor in words indicating abstract ideas.

New things are identified by comparison with familiar objects: a steamer, for instance, becomes *umiarsuaq*, a large *umiak*; while the word for an ordinary rowing boat is *umiatsiaq*, rather like an *umiak*. The word for the moon is *aninka*, so coins are called *aningaussat*, moon likenesses; while oats becomes *suaussat*, like fish-roe.

When I went to the West Coast I found I could make myself understood but that nearly all the nouns were different—the names for seals and birds, articles of hunting equipment, colours and so on. The reason for this, other than the long isolation of the Angmagssalik Eskimos, is that various common words, especially those named after deceased persons, became taboo and had to be replaced, usually by derived words. For instance, when the hunter Kajarpak, of Sermilik, died, the *kayak* was renamed *sarquit*—means of wandering, and that word is always used on the East Coast except in the settlement itself where the men are more sophisticated. The salmon becomes *kaporniagaq*, that which is speared; the falcon, *napalekitseq*, the short-necked one; white, *akisugtoq*, that which gives reflection. None of these Angmagssalik words were understood on the West Coast.

On July 17th, at 3 A.M. I had just gone to bed, after another session of drum-dancing, when I thought I heard a shot, and looking out of the window saw the *Stella* coming gently to her moorings.

They had any amount of news for me, some of it sad news. The Danish nurse at Angmagssalik had fallen through the ice and was drowned: apparently she had got into the rather dangerous habit of going for long walks alone on the sea-ice. Her ice-spear had been found beside a hole in a narrow channel between a headland and an island.

Yelmar, the greatest hunter of the whole Angmagssalik district, was also dead: he had died of heart failure like his father before him.

The dispute between Denmark and Norway over the possession of parts of East Greenland had been settled by the court at the Hague in favour of Denmark. As a consequence Lauge Koch and Knud Rasmussen, two of the leading Danish explorers, had divided this coast, and while Lauge Koch was running a very large expedition to the part north of Scoresby Sound, Knud Rasmussen was even now at Angmagssalik with two ships, the *Nordstjern* and *Kivioq*, a great many motor-boats, a seaplane, and about sixty men. As well as undertaking an extensive scientific programme he was making a film of the life of the Angmagssalik Eskimos. With characteristic kindness he had promised to take us to Iceland in the *Nordstjern* in September, thus giving us almost two months longer in Greenland, as well as saving us great expense. Also one of his ships would call in to Lake Fjord on the way up to Kangerdlugsuak and pick up the rest of our gear.

This meant a considerable change in our plans. We would have to wait at the Base till Rasmussen's ship should come, then Rymill and Riley would work their way slowly southward, stopping to improve parts of the maps where we had already found inaccuracies. I would go by kayak to Cape Dan with Enock's family, and would do ornithological work there till the others should join me in the *Stella*, then we would all go to Angmagssalik in time to catch the *Nordstjern*.

Rymill, saying he had a surprise for me, handed me a large parcel which I found to contain not only about thirty letters from England but a copy of my book *Northern Lights*, which had been published in my absence from England the previous autumn. It seemed strange and exciting to see it now for the first time so many months

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

after it had come out, like a soldier returning from the wars to see a child born in his absence.

Although the ice was still very closely packed, the *Stella* had come back from Angmagssalik in under 48 hours, only stopping when held up by fog; but the journey down had taken about three weeks. On several occasions the boat very nearly got crushed in the ice. A week had to be spent at Enock's camp waiting for an opportunity to pass unbroken bay-ice which blocked the channel between Sartermie and the mainland till the end of June. A few days later they were hemmed in between the rocky shore and the close pack-ice which ground and crushed against the coast: they had to use dynamite several times to force a way into a little shallow haven from which they were unable to escape for another five days.

Luckily they had taken plenty of food with them and were able to shoot as many birds as they wanted. Many times the *Stella* got squeezed between two floes, but although she creaked and groaned sometimes under the strain no great damage was done. Riley had rigged a rope ladder and wooden platform up the mast of the *Stella*, and this crow's nest made all the difference when they were working through thick pack. Though it was only ten feet above the deck, one had a clear view over most of the ice and could shout directions to the man at the wheel, while the third man fended off the ice with a pole.

On one occasion they were pressed by the ice against an overhanging rock wall which towered for about a thousand feet above them, when suddenly a shower of enormous boulders, loosened by the summer sun, poured just beside the boat on to the ice; another bombardment fell just in front of them, but nothing actually hit the *Stella*.

We had expected the *Nordstjern* or the *Kivioq* to reach Lake Fjord any time after July 20th but it was actually August 15th before the *Kivioq* arrived; and as we did not want to risk being away when she reached

## STRANGE MEETINGS

our Base, no serious journeys could be made during this month.

Enock's family stayed with us all the time, though they would not have done so had they known at the outset how long it would be before Knud Rasmussen would arrive. "Knusi," as they called him, is the hero of all the Eskimos, and Enock was very anxious not to miss him.

During this time Emmanuely, the boy of about 17 years, became seriously ill, and we were afraid at one time that he might not live. He had a high temperature, and a strange diffuse swelling above his knee which caused him so much pain that he would groan all the time he was awake. Later on similar swellings appeared on his chest and arms. The Eskimos are not really a very healthy people, and once they get ill they immediately think they are going to die. What must be, must be, they think, and it is no use trying to do anything about it. Of Enock's family of eleven, Kidarsi suffered frequently from frightful boils, while his wife had fits and often became so violent that she had to be held down. Enock and Nikolay were healthy enough but Weedydymena had terrible headaches, while Leah had been continually ill since the birth of her last daughter, and had something wrong with one of her legs.

The Eskimos did not hunt very much: they seemed to be quite contented living on salmon, of which we could catch as many as we wanted in the seining net, sometimes getting as many as a hundred in a single day. In any case seals were remarkably scarce in the fjord till about August 10th, when their numbers suddenly increased. Before that date one might spend a whole day out kayaking and only see a single bearded or fjord seal; but after the first week of August we saw young bladder-nosed and Greenland seals, as well as the two other kinds, and often as many as ten or twenty during a day's hunting.

One day at the beginning of August Kidarsi saw 17 narwhals by the glacier in the branch fjord. He was on land at

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

the time (when seals are scarce the hunters often go ashore and from the vantage of the higher view-point search the fjord with field-glasses) and saw them playing about on the surface of the water looking as white as the ice itself—small narwhals are black, but larger ones are marbled black and white or pure greyish white. Although Kidarsi paddled as fast as he could towards them, a sudden wind got up, raising a chop on the water, and they made off at once, several of them showing their ivory tusks as they broke the waves.

We had all too many days of windy, squally weather, but it was good practice for kayaking, and between periods of foggy or wild weather we had several days of glorious sunshine when I used to bathe in the fjord, and we could have tea "in the garden."

Some time was spent going round in the *Stella* finishing off the map of the fjord, and when that was done we made a sounding machine and spent several days rowing up and down the fjord taking soundings every fifty yards. Lake Fjord itself was found to be fairly shallow: the last quarter of a mile is of course very shallow, except for the channel of the river, then it drops rather suddenly to 10 fathoms. On the north side of the fjord marking this spot there is a fair-sized cairn which was always known as Scheldrup's cairn, after the captain of the *Quest*. It was built in 1930 when we first entered the fjord in the *Quest*. Beyond that the bottom slopes gradually down to 40 fathoms just where it meets the branch fjord.

With a sounding line 40 fathoms long we did not find bottom anywhere in the branch fjord nor in the channels on either side of the island. When Rymill carried his kayak up to the lake and took soundings there, it too was deeper than 40 fathoms on the southern side, but the opposite shore slopes down more gently.

On August 6th we were out in the whale-boat taking soundings in the channel by Ailsa. It was a most unpleasant day: the clouds were down to about 1,500 feet, it

## STRANGE MEETINGS

was raining, and so squally that our boat was shipping water. At about 3.30 P.M. we were just about to give it up when suddenly, swinging round the corner of Cape Wandel, a small seaplane appeared. It flew quite low over us, swung round as far as the junction of the two branches of the fjord, then continued on its way south and was soon lost in the clouds. This machine was a great mystery to us: we knew it was not Rasmussen's seaplane because we had seen that pass high over the fjord a week or two earlier, and in any case the weather was certainly unfit for making survey flights. We came to the conclusion that it was either one of Lauge Koch's machines that had lost its way, or else the beginning of a Russian or Japanese invasion of Greenland!

We had staying with us at this time two members of Rasmussen's expedition, who had appeared one day in a small motor-boat with a native pilot from Cape Dan; while trying to get north to do geological work, they had been stopped by ice just off Lake Fjord. They told us that Rasmussen's work had been very much delayed by bad weather: on only two days in the last month had the weather been good enough for his aeroplane to do flights for taking aerial photographs. Then he had had to dash down to Tingmiarmiut, in the *Kivioq*, to break a way through thick ice for the *Dagmar*, one of his survey boats, which was unable to move.

On August 9th the *Dagmar* herself, a seaworthy motor-boat of about 6 tons, entered Lake Fjord. She had come straight up from Angmagssalik, so we could get the latest news. Knud Rasmussen had gone south to lay a depot, but would visit Lake Fjord on his way to Scoresby Sound in the *Kivioq* in a few days' time.

The aeroplane that had so puzzled us, we eventually discovered, was Colonel Lindbergh's. Apparently he was doing experimental flights over the northern route for Pan-American Airways. In a Lougheed Vega monoplane he flew over the Ice Cap from Holsteinborg to Ella Island, north of

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

Scoresby Sound, one of the stations of Lauge Koch's expedition. From there he flew up to Clavering Island and then came south again to Angmagssalik on the day that we saw him, running into bad weather about Kangerdlugsuak. Keeping in wireless communication all the time with Angmagssalik, he flew round the settlement and over to Sermilik Fjord, and then returning made a very good landing in the harbour. In spite of low clouds and stormy weather he seemed to be perfectly at his ease, and when Rasmussen came out in a motor-boat to help him, he and Mrs. Lindbergh, who was his wireless operator, were calmly mooring up their machine.

Lindbergh spent some time at Angmagssalik. He flew over the Ice Cap to Godhaab, spent a short time there, and then went to Julianehaab, after which he returned to Angmagssalik *en route* for Iceland. He said that he thought Greenland was a wonderful country to fly in during the summer, but as far as the Air-Route was concerned the trouble would be to compete with the liners who could cross from Southampton to New York, whatever the weather, in five days.

On August 15th we were going out in the *Stella* to do some survey work when we saw the *Kivioq* further out among the ice. A very serviceable ship she looked, of 22 tons, small enough to dodge about through the pack, but sufficiently large and strongly built to withstand any amount of pressure—an ideal ship for work in East Greenland.

Soon after we had brought the *Kivioq* to her moorings the *Dagmar* returned to Lake Fjord; she had tried to reach Cape Gustav Holm but had been prevented by the ice, and hearing on his wireless that Rasmussen was at Lake Fjord the captain had returned to discuss further plans.

After lunch Lindbergh's seaplane suddenly appeared—Lake Fjord was indeed a busy place that day. He flew down over the Lake and the next fjord, came low past the hut waving to us, then went off to Iceland. Most other

fliers who have visited Greenland in the past seem either to have crashed or to have made much of the difficulties of flying in this country, but Lindbergh seemed always to be entirely at his ease, and it was typical of him that he should visit Lake Fjord on his way from Angmagssalik to Reykjavik, though it was at least a hundred miles out of his way.

We were much disappointed that Knud Rasmussen could not stay longer with us, but he was trying to make up for lost time as he had been so much delayed by continuous bad weather. The *Kivioq* was going further north to try to get some film of bears and narwhal; she would pick up our gear on her way south again if we left it ready inside the hut.

The next day we spent packing everything up. The natives did not do much about it till the actual day on which we were going, then they got up at dawn and started filling the umiak with all the miscellaneous collections of things we had given them. It soon became apparent that when they picked up the things they had left at Sartermie the Plimsoll Line of the umiak would be some way under water, so we gave Enock the collapsible boat so that he could put his dogs in that, leaving the umiak for the remainder.

The natives and I got away finally just before midday. Rymill, Riley and Nikolay were going to spend another night at the Base, then with the whale-boat in tow they would set off in the *Stella*, first to finish the survey of the head of Nigertusok, then to make their way to Cape Dan, stopping at certain places to correct inaccuracies in the existing maps.

Many strangers have practised kayaking as a sport, some of them even acquiring remarkable skill in it within a short time; but if we fancy one of the same removed to a place on the Greenland coast where no assistance was to be had from natives, we doubt if it would be of any essential use to him as regards obtaining his livelihood. . . . The difference between practising an art as a diversion and as a means of subsistence is very great in this instance. The skill in manœuvring the kayak which is admirable in a foreigner is as easy to a Greenlander as walking on terra firma is to us.

DR. HENRY RINK. 1877

## CHAPTER XIII

### CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

*August 17th.* When Kidarsi was making something yesterday his knife slipped and he cut his hand right across the ball of the thumb; Weedy mena put three stitches in it and he kayaked all to-day, though holding the paddle must have hurt terribly. Sheer pain doesn't seem to worry them much as they have any amount of fortitude.

I saw a Meadow Pipit near the Base this morning and many Greenland Redpolls. A simply marvellous day, like yesterday. Enock steered the umiak, Kidarsi and I kayaked behind. Everyone was in a very holiday humour —even Emmanuely who is still far from well. A heavy swell outside the fjord. My kayak was very wobbly at first because I haven't been out in it for several days and the skins are dry: this makes a surprising difference. It's the first time I've tried a rough sea with full hunting gear on, and I was rather unhappy at first.

This is what I carry nowadays: on the extreme front a wide screen about 2 feet 6 inches by 14 inches with a flap of cloth hanging down to the water on each side of the bows; this form of screen is best for shot-gun shooting, and it is on a pivot, so that in thick ice, or when the wind is troublesome, it can be pushed round with the end of the paddle till it lies parallel to the kayak. The other form of screen, on a frame immediately in front of the kayak-stand, is preferable for rifle and harpoon technique as it affords better concealment while the harpoon is being lifted, and in calm weather the rifle can be steadied on the top of the screen while shooting. Of hunting implements, besides a 16-bore shot-gun in its seal-skin cover I carry a harpoon—

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

of the standard type (the lighter "winged" harpoon is rare at Angmagssalik)—and two long lances on the deck behind me; one throw-stick fits all three. I have given up trying to learn how to use the bird-dart and bladder-dart, as it takes me all my time to throw my harpoon with accuracy. Then there is the harpoon-line and float, and of course the kayak-stand to hold the former. As well as this I carry a short lance a yard long, for actually killing the seal, a number of wound plugs, an apparatus for towing the seal, and a bit of curved wood for forcing a space between the skin and blubber of a seal preparatory to blowing it up for towing home. Being an optimist I used to carry a spare hunting-line and float—deflated—on the back of my kayak, in case I harpooned a seal or narwhal too large to be upheld by a single float, but as I shall not be hunting alone that is superfluous. Inside the kayak I have my kayak-coat—in case of stormy weather, my rifle, and sleeping-bag.

The umiak is very slow: Weedymena has a strained wrist, Leah is never very strong, and Amelia is about to have a child, so the speed depends on the three girls. There is a long heavy swell from the south-east and a head wind from the south. I had to concentrate very hard on keeping upright. Off Hell Corner there is a big sunken rock and the waves naturally tend to break over it; just as I passed the rock there was a horrible sideways backwash off an iceberg on one side and off the vertical rocky shore on the other. I wobbled terribly and continually had to balance with the paddle: Kidarsi just roared and roared with laughter! We visited the Gallery here and shot a number of young Gulls off the ledges; one young Iceland Gull, which had not yet left the nest, had a complete Little Auk—bar the head—in its stomach. A pair of very dark Falcons have their nest directly above the Gallery: they circled round screaming incessantly. The umiak had a narrow escape here. I happened to be watching it at the

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

time, marvelling at the way it bobbed up and down on the waves without shipping any water. It was just passing a big iceberg, which was also swaying up and down. Suddenly the iceberg lost its balance and started to roll ponderously over. Enock shouted to his crew, and standing up in the stern paddled furiously with his steering oar, the others rowing at twice the normal speed. In a very short time the wave caught the umiak and lifted the stern high in the air—I thought it was bound to capsize, but no, it floated clear.

Just after this I saw a fjord seal in front of me; I hit it, but we saw it no more. Shooting was not so difficult as I had expected. In the mouth of Kangerdlugsuatsiak there was suddenly a great commotion in the water quite near me: the natives thought at first that it was a narwhal. It turned out to be a pack of 20 or 30 Greenland seals, who alternately swam along and dived, a medley of black heads, threshing fins and white spray. As I paddled towards them the waves washing over the deck swept my harpoon into the water, and as I picked it up the throw-stick, which fits too loosely, dropped off and momentarily got left behind. I shot one of the seals in the head at quite close range but it sank at once. I wish I could have tried to harpoon it, this was a chance of a lifetime. Enock says that packs of Greenland seals pass Cape Dan in June and July going northwards; they are then very thin. In September they return, very fat. But this kind of seal has always less blubber on it than the others and may sink at any time of the year. When wounded the Greenland seal usually comes up a great distance away, and when harpooned is noted for diving at such speed that the harpoon-line simply flies from the kayak-stand. Crossing Kangerdlugsuatsiak as it got dark was very tedious. It is 7 miles wide and we saw no seals to cheer us up. There were many parties of Black Guillemots swimming south in a curiously close formation. Kidarsi and I left the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

umiak behind and reached the camp on Sartermie at 9 P.M. That is 10 consecutive hours in a kayak; the most I have ever been. My legs were completely dead, and I had to be helped out on to the rocks and then had to wait for several minutes before I could walk. I was rather wet too, as the waves had come over the top of my kayak-belt.

There are a great many old winter-houses here, and we found enough scraps of wood and blubber to build a fire and cook the seagulls in time for the arrival of the umiak, an hour later and long after dark. They are marvellous people: we heard their laughter and song over the water long before they arrived, full of jokes and not the least bit tired or cross. Saw first northern lights of the season, just desultory green flashes, no constant rays. We all slept in Enock's tent, but having no blubber for the lamps it was cold and very smelly. It is fun to be travelling in a country which is still in its glacial period and with people just emerging from the stone age.

*August 18th.* I thought we were going on to-day, so got up early. Enock never tells me his plans, for the good reason that he hasn't got any, but it's rather tiresome sometimes! We spent all to-day packing up. I collected plants and watched birds. It is blowing and cloudy, with a big swell even in here. Kidarsi shot a small seal in the evening, so we had blubber for the lamps and plenty of meat for supper. He hit the seal with a .22 rifle, then reached it before it sank; they like to use a .22 even for the biggest seals, because they don't sink so soon with a small wound. Enock is displeased with the shot-gun we gave him: it is too long, he says, and the shot scatters overmuch. The remedy was simple—he sawed six inches off the end of the barrel and then hammered the end into an oval so that no pellets are wasted at the sides.

*August 19th.* A marvellous cloudless sunny day after

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

a blustery night. We got up before the sun at 3 A.M. Enock woke us up by taking the tent down. Had I known such an early start was intended I would have gone to bed earlier. We were away before 5 A.M.

Loading up the umiak requires some skill. The tent skins are first put right along the bottom, then a big pile of bear, fox and seal-skins, boxes of tools, cooking gear, bundles of clothes and so on: these are put well towards the stern. All the meat goes up in the extreme bows, away from the dogs, who are on the floor in the middle. The tent poles go along the top, holding everything down. Emmanuely, the invalid, lay on top of the load. Enock was right in the stern with his steering oar, and the rest of the rowers well up in the bows. The umiak hardly went down at all in spite of this load. The swell is much worse since we arrived; although we are in a sheltered channel we had to get into our kayaks on land and then slide down into the water.

The silhouette of the umiak looked wonderful against a lurid red sunrise and pale violet shadows on the water. There is not much ice about and the swell increased as we went in behind Ananah Island. The sea was vilely rough here and came at one from all directions in a most underhand way. By the old winter-houses on the sheltered side of Ananah Kidarsi landed, though with difficulty. I pretended I didn't want to land because I saw I would probably upset—though I regretted this later. I find the getting in and out of a kayak in a rough sea, especially with full deck cargo, by far the hardest thing of all, but it makes a lot of difference putting a piece of an old kayak skin inside so that one's feet don't catch on the ribs of the kayak. The umiak soon came up with us. Enock is rather worried because it is clouding over, and he says we may not be able to get past the exposed stretch this side of Sermiligak. He says if we can't get past to-night we may have to wait a week for

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

it to calm down again, especially if it is going to blow as he thinks. Towing the collapsible boat makes the umiak very much slower, especially in rough water.

We shot a number of young seagulls this afternoon but only saw three seals all day. At 3 P.M. we passed Katunah and then an island called Aputatik, which has a miniature ice cap right down to sea level. It was far too rough for us to land, though one of the girls jumped ashore from the umiak to get some drinking water. Enock says we must go straight on to Sermiligak, as the wind has dropped and we can probably get past the dangerous bit. The natives are all very cheerful still; they take it in turn always to have one rorer resting. Kidarsi and I held on to the gunwale of the umiak and got a drink of water, some berries, liver and blubber. The next few hours were the most agonising I have ever spent in my life. In the channel between Ikowe and the mainland the sea got much worse. Real big rollers were coming in and there was a nasty backwash from the shore. We went very slowly against the tide, while the seas got worse and worse. It got dark but we still went on. My gloves were very wet and my hands numb: one must carry a spare pair on a long trip. When the stars came out it started to blow a little against us, and a nasty chop came right over the kayaks. My kayak-belt was rather sodden by then and had slipped down a bit so that water kept on getting inside. In the darkness it was awful, because I couldn't see the waves coming till they suddenly tipped me up first one way then the other, swirled me sideways, or rushed me on for a few yards. I was continually losing my balance, going over a little way and then feverishly pushing myself back with the paddle. The nervous strain was terrific—hour after hour without respite. They were rather frightened in the umiak, as they shipped quite a lot of water. With the tide and wind against us we hardly made any headway—indeed I

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

think we were sometimes driven backwards. The women wanted to turn back, but Enock said it would be all right round the next point, and started to sing one of the old songs to brace them up. Kidarsi was wonderful, he kept just beside me, and when we waited for the umiak, which we had to do every half hour or so, we put our kayaks alongside and rested the paddles right across so that we could lean on them and relax. Each time we did this I incontinently fell asleep. I have never been so dead weary in my life. I was so tired that I couldn't see properly, everything appeared double. The strain of continually balancing the kayak for twenty hours had completely worn me out, though muscularly I was not abnormally tired. About dawn we got into calmer water, and by the time we reached the islands where John fell through the ice in February, it was comparatively smooth.

As we were talking to the umiak, and Enock was ragging me for being so exhausted, all at once I felt normal again and quite enjoyed the next few hours paddling in calm waters to Sermiligak settlement.

It is traditional that when a long-distance travelling party reach a large settlement they all come in together, with the kayakmen hurling their harpoons and the umiak rowing alongside; otherwise Kidarsi and I could have left the umiak behind and gone on to Sermiligak, where we expected to find a cheerful crowd of Eskimos. As it was, the umiak got slower and slower as the rowers one by one fell asleep, and it was five o'clock in the morning before we got in. I had been 24 hours in my kayak without getting out of it. We were terribly disappointed to find no Eskimos here; there were only a few emaciated dogs which had been left behind to spend the summer there, sustaining life with what scraps of blubber and offal they could find. I thought of Capt. Tving (of the *Gertrud Rask*) who once said that his greatest fear was that in a reincarnation he might be an Angmagssalik sledge-dog ! Enock

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

says they will all be hunting narwhal further up the fjord.

After we had landed I got into my kayak again to recover my throw-stick which had fallen off and was floating away. I stopped for a moment to look round and immediately fell asleep, waking up with a start to find myself far enough over for the water to flow in at the manhole! I pushed up with the paddle, only getting one arm wet. The Eskimos didn't seem very tired. The umiak had shipped about 20 buckets of water and some of the skins and boxes were very wet. There were several inches of water in my kayak when I came to empty it out, so below the belt I was soaked to the skin and for some time was quite unable to use my lower limbs. We slept about on the rocks in the sunshine without bothering to put up the tent, only waking up for a meal of boiled seagull.

*August 20th.* Rested all day. To-morrow we shall reach Cape Dan if the weather is good, but it doesn't look promising. Enock told me that a family was crossing Sermilik fjord some years ago in an umiak on their way back after wintering 200 miles further south. They were in the middle of the fjord when an iceberg broke up and upset the umiak. All the women and children were drowned, only the man in the stern managing to get on to a piece of ice.

*August 21st.* Stormy day. Clouds flying past and a violent wind. Last night we slept under the upturned umiak in the traditional way, but to-day we put up the tent, which was just as well because in the evening it poured with rain.

*August 22nd.* Sea too rough to go on, so Enock, Kidarsi and I kayaked to visit the Eskimos who are camping on the low pass between Sermilik and Kangerdluarsikajik fjords. There are six tents here and many old friends. The tents of the better hunters have a lining of seal-skin

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

with the fur turned inwards, and a large translucent curtain of bearded seal gut, in alternate light and dark strips, hanging across the entrance. Yelmar's old wife is here, still heart-broken and weeping incessantly. It has been a wonderful year for narwhal and about seven have been killed, not counting smaller ones without ivory. Subotsie was out alone and got one which had a tusk nine feet long and at the base was as thick as a man's ankle. He harpooned it first, then blew up his spare float, and when it came up to breathe he harpooned it a second time. He had to lance it and shoot at it again and again before it died, the hunt altogether taking about five hours. The other day one of the old hunters got an attack of kayak-giddiness: this apparently only comes on in very still water and is probably caused by overmuch smoking. The victim told me that he became as it were hypnotised by the reflections in the water. He slowly capsized, recovering only when his head went under water, and not sufficiently to enable him to come up again unaided, though he was a competent roller. One, Iago, harpooned a bladder-nosed seal but failed to kill it. The animal attacked the kayak, and as often as the Eskimo came up again with his paddle the seal capsized him. At last he became too exhausted to roll any longer, so wriggled out of his kayak and held on to the float. The seal then wound the hunting-line round him and bit one of his boots off; but Iago managed to get out his pocket-knife and cut the line, after which the seal had the decency to make off. When the other hunters arrived, attracted by his shouts, he was in a fainting condition and had to be lifted out on to an ice-floe. Most of the hunters here have the tooth-marks of bladder-nosed seals on their lances, and about half of the more enterprising hunters have at one time or another been attacked by these animals. There are a few men here who are such bad kayakers that they never carry harpoon-line or float. This

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

is rather consoling, as I had always imagined that all the Angmagssalik Eskimos were born first-class kayakmen.

We were given lumps of narwhal-skin to eat, but unfortunately it had been preserved in rancid blubber, so was not up to standard. A favourite Eskimo dish is berries, rancid seal oil and dried seal's blood, all eaten together; we were given this, and dried seal-meat too, which I found excellent when eaten with fresh blubber. Berries also are nicer eaten with fresh blubber, so also are dwarf willow and dandelion leaves, oxyria roots, sedum shoots and indeed all the Eskimo delicacies.

*August 23rd.* Up at 5, not away till 8. Fine sunny day but fog came on later. We went first to some islands which the Sermiligak hunters always visit in spring. About May, when the fjord-ice starts to break up, they put their umiaks on their sledges—one umiak across two sledges—and with their families camp on these islands, round which great numbers of fjord seals and a few bearded seals lie out on the ice. Then when the ice all breaks up they go in the umiaks to the head of the fjord to hunt narwhal. About June when the pack-ice loosens up they go to Cape Dan and the outer islands for bladder-nosed seals; after which, with a short stop at certain well-known skerries for Terns' eggs, they collect at Angmagssalik settlement to do their year's shopping. On the way back to Sermiligak they spend a few days hunting Greenland seals, then after a visit to the salmon rivers they are ready to start rebuilding their houses and preparing for another winter. What a marvellous life! How very much better than spending all one's life making money. With plenty of books to read I could ask for no better existence.

Saw very few seals, only occasional packs of Greenland seals and a few single ones. They have black heads and a large divided splash of black down the back, otherwise the skin is pale grey. Met a dozen Red-necked Phala-

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

ropes swimming along miles from any land. There are some islands here where the Eider Ducks annually nest, together with innumerable Arctic Terns, a few of which are still feeding their young.

In the afternoon fog came down and it got bitterly cold. Enock said we would travel all night again while the sea remained fairly calm. I had just shot a Guillemot when we heard an answering shot from out of the fog in front of us. They all got very excited, saying it must be a hunting party from Cape Dan camping among the islands here to hunt Greenland seals. Just as it began to get dark the fog cleared a little and we saw the rising smoke of a fire and a crowd of people moving about on the low foreshore of an island. They caught sight of us, gazed intently at us for a moment, then recognising that we were Enock's party returning fired off shot after shot in salute of the great hunter; then the men kayaked out to meet us. It was a grand moment. They made a tremendous fuss of me, never having imagined that a European could manage a kayak in weather like this—a good thing they didn't see me the other night! Most of these people are relations of Enock, and their welcome was wonderful. They gave us huge platefuls of lovely pink-fleshed river-trout, and as much seal-meat as we could eat. Tomorrow we shall all go back to Cape Dan together. It is too rough to go the shortest way, so we shall have to get into Angmagssalik Fjord and then work eastwards in the shelter of the islands.

*August 24th.* Still foggy but clearing. Away at 6. Four umiaks and about a dozen kayaks. Everybody very cheerful. One old woman started singing songs in a wonderful deep resonant voice. Marvellous hot sun came out and we paddled along following the umiaks and gossiping; all the hunters throw their harpoons every few minutes. They kept on making me throw mine, but I do it very badly. When an Eskimo's harpoon enters the

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

water it makes a hollow "plomp" because the tail of the harpoon exactly follows the point, making no splash at all; mine makes quite a different sound.

Very few seals to-day, but saw one porpoise. They tell me that only about five porpoises have been secured since they can remember, as they invariably sink when shot and are very hard to approach by kayak. At midday we stopped at a famous mussel place, picking them off the rocks in shallow water. We ate them raw by the handful, and followed them up with an edible sea-weed which is good but rather dull. In Angmagssalik Fjord we met a headwind which raised a steep chop about three feet high. Facing it the kayak goes bump ! bump ! into the waves and water is thrown all over one. Crossing such a sea is the very devil: not only is it very difficult to balance but the side wind continuously forces the stern round so that one has to paddle furiously all the time on the same side. After some rather unpleasant seas we reached an island from which we could look across the bay to Cape Dan settlement. We all landed here and fired off a fusillade of shots: the natives are not very particular where they shoot, and it was rather surprising that there were no casualties.

The Cape Dan people knew that this must mean Enock's return, so after firing off all the ammunition they had they came out to meet us in kayaks and umiaks. We got in at about 7.30 to meet a crowd of Eskimos on the foreshore. They show no emotion when they greet each other, even after a year's absence.

*August 25th.* This is rather a bleak place and the weather always seems to be stormy. The far side of the island—Kulusuk they call it—is quite mountainous, but the northern end is fairly low. Here there is a wooden church and house where the catechist lives, and about ten Eskimo dwellings. These are all much more up to date than others I have seen: all have either wooden floors or

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

walls. Enock's house, the smartest of them all, is larger than our Base hut and of the same design, only it is built up outside as far as the eaves, with a thick wall of sods and stones. The only furniture is a square iron stove and a sleeping bench running right across the back of the room.

A disadvantage of this more civilised type of house—from the hygienic point of view—is that the Eskimos tend to live in them all through the summer instead of following the traditional Eskimo way of travelling about and living in tents, during which time the house, with the roof removed, gets a good airing.

There are no seals here at present, but as many cod as they care to catch. However, they only get as many as they want from day to day and never think of drying any for the winter. Apparently a great attraction of this place is that in the early summer, when the pack breaks up, countless numbers of bladder-nosed seals pass on migration. While the seals are here the natives hardly sleep at all, and anybody who can hold a rifle goes out. The small boys and hunters without kayaks shoot the seals in the shallow channels, then recover them at low tide by dredging with fish hooks. The skilful hunters get six or seven each day while the migration is going on. A favourite hunting method is for a number of hunters to collect on a level floe where the bladder-nosed seals are numerous. The hunters' kayaks are arranged on the ice so that they point in as many different directions as possible. Whoever sees a seal shoots it at once, while the owner of the kayak pointing towards the seal gets into it, and sliding into the water, paddles as rapidly as he can to harpoon the seal before it sinks. The skin of a bladder-nosed seal, which may be very large, though not strong enough for boot-soles or hunting-line, is used for covering umiaks and kayaks and also for tents. It interests me to hear that Kidarsi, though an excellent wood-worker, is getting his

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

uncle to make his new kayak: so specialised is the construction that the good hunters prefer to get their kayaks made by one of half-a-dozen noted experts.

*August 26th.* Went across Angmagssalik Fjord to Tasiussarsaq to see Emmanuel's mother and to arrange for his being given a lift across. Rasmussen's film is at present being made here. There is a German lawyer in charge and three camera men. They have had the greatest trouble making the film, as all the Eskimos have had very bad colds, and on account of bad weather only about one day in six has been any good for photography. The natives are not entirely helpful: the chief actor was missing one day and they found he had kayaked home to see that his supply of dried meat was in order! The Eskimos have little sense of responsibility, and see nothing very wrong with breaking their word; but they are wonderful actors, especially the older ones and the children. A story from the West Coast illustrates this side of the Greenlanders' mentality. A ship came in to Holsteinborg, and as it was rather late in the year the captain was in a great hurry to unload and agreed to pay the Greenlanders twice the normal wage. The first day they all worked as hard as they could, but on the second day not a soul appeared. The mate went round to find out what was the matter. "Well," they said, when questioned, "yesterday we did two days' work, so to-day we stay at home."

There was a really big swell coming back across Angmagssalik Fjord and we had to put our kayak coats on. I was very unsteady; the trouble in a big sea is that I have to spend so much time balancing with the paddle that I don't keep enough headway. To-day there were bunches of seaweed about and whenever my paddle caught in one I all but capsized. In the evening I tried rolling in a very rough sea. Wearing a kayak coat and being prepared to roll makes all the difference and I felt per-

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

fectly happy in the roughest water. It is very much easier to roll if you go over with the wind and let it help you up again. Much less effort is needed if you start to come up again before the kayak has come to a standstill on its way over. I managed to roll in eight different ways with the paddle, then for the first time I came up with my hand alone. By the end of the day I learnt to roll with left or right hand, both by the forward and backward methods. There are several ways of rolling with the paddle which I am sure I could never learn however long I practised, especially the methods when you start off with the paddle behind the neck, and the one when you keep the paddle underneath the kayak all the time. A narrow kayak is faster and much better in a choppy sea because it cuts through the waves, while a wide one bumps like a box; but the latter sinks too low in the water when you are carrying a seal on deck. A boy capsized in his kayak to-day. He was pulling in a cod when he lost his balance and went over. His companion rescued him without difficulty, though, as he was not wearing a kayak coat, the kayak was half full of water. Some time ago the schoolmaster here, who is an indifferent hunter but a very skilful roller, shot too far out to the side with his shot-gun, and capsized. Before coming up again he had the presence of mind to push the gun back into the seal-skin cover on the deck of the kayak: he was quite annoyed that his pipe had gone out!

*August 27th.* I walked over the island to-day and saw the remains of a line of cairns which the Eskimos used in ancient times to drive the reindeer. These stone pillars were built to represent men, then with the occasional appearance of a real man the animals were gradually driven to where the lines of cairns converged in an ambush. Except for a great many young Lapland Buntings there are very few birds here. Most of the Eskimo women and children are out berry-picking for

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

winter provision: they store them with blubber in seal-skins.

*August 30th.* Heavy rain and stormy weather. Kidarsi and I went hunting in a fairly sheltered fjord and I had the great luck to see him get a big bearded seal with his harpoon alone, a thing that is very rarely done owing to the extreme shyness of this kind of seal. We were paddling quietly along when suddenly a bearded seal broke the surface about thirty yards to one side of Kidarsi's kayak and started swimming away from him with its back and the top of its head showing. Kidarsi very cautiously turned his kayak and paddled up so that the body of the seal was only just in front of a line level with the point of his kayak, but at 30° out to the right. Then he gently lifted his harpoon and hurled it as hard as he could. There was a tremendous splash as the seal was hit; Kidarsi put the throw-stick between his teeth, leaving both hands free to make a few quick strokes on the right of the kayak, then threw the float well out on the same side. A second afterwards the float was pulled underneath. After ten minutes' the float bobbed up some distance away, followed a few seconds later by the seal which started to swim away at great speed dragging the float behind it. Kidarsi told me to lance it, so I paddled alongside and threw my lance. The seal dived at once, nearly upsetting me as it did so, because I had not kept it far enough out to the side. Next time the seal appeared it was more animated and tried to free itself. First it jumped right out of the water then started shaking itself and making quick shallow dives. When it quietened down a bit Kidarsi threw his lance and the seal dived once more. Neither of our lances had found a vital spot, for the seal was still far from dead. We recovered our lances again, but next time the seal came up it was less violent and Kidarsi shot it in the head with a .22 rifle: it sank at once, but its

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

weight hardly pulled the float down at all. This seal was nearly nine feet long and enormously fat. The stomach contained several kinds of crayfish and prawns. The natives empty out the intestines and stomach and then fill them with the seal's blood and put them in the sun to dry.

The *Gertrud Rask* is due to reach Angmagssalik in a few days' time; she is very late this year as she got damaged on her last trip. There is no ice at all outside, it has all drifted south.

*August 31st.* Was sitting talking to Enock and wishing the weather would clear when a boy came rushing in to say that the *Stella* was coming across the bay. Sure enough she was, in spite of a big sea and a really nasty wind. I was frightfully glad to see them again. I must say that I like them both even better now than I did when we left England, which I should think is more than can be said at the end of most expeditions.

They have had a satisfactory trip and done some useful mapping. After spending a few days at the head of Nigertusok they went round to fill in a bit of the map at the far end of Kangerdlugsuatsiak. After that they had such big seas that the *Stella* started dipping her gunwales under, and they were afraid she might founder.

After mapping the fjord to the north of Depot Fjord they went on to the upper part of Sermiligak Fjord, which had never been properly surveyed. Bad weather had interfered with their work, but in spite of this they had done very well.

Rolled my kayak in the evening. I think it's the best sport in the world. One of the Eskimos here has a small wooden fin attached to the bottom of his kayak about a yard from the stern: it is ten inches long and four inches deep at the most. Most of the kayakmen on the West Coast use them to counteract the sidewise motion caused

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

by each stroke of the paddle, and also to keep the kayak steady in a side wind. It is unsuitable for conditions here, as it would be more difficult to dodge about in thick ice and would prevent the hunters sliding in their kayaks from an ice-floe down into the water. We are waiting to get across to Angmagssalik in the *Stella*, but it is still far too rough.

*September 1st.* Foul weather: violent wind and exceedingly high sea. Spent a lot of time rolling: I shall try to cross to Angmagssalik to-morrow if I can get any of the natives to accept the responsibility of coming with me. A Norwegian long-liner of about 100 tons ran into a bay on the far side of the island for shelter. They say the seas outside are enormous.

*September 2nd.* The wind seemed a little less in the morning, so I started off with Mortisie and Dartsie. I knew I should have a pretty grim time, but I think I can always come up again if I capsize, so it's really a question of endurance. It's only sixteen miles as the crow flies, but there is no protection from the open sea and the last half is notoriously stormy.

It was all right across the bay and between some low islands to the open sea. After that it was awful. A very violent north-easter got up and blew so fiercely that the tops of the waves were torn off horizontally in sheets of spray. Sinister looking clouds swept along behind us and torrential rain fell. After getting across Angmagssalik Fjord we kept a mile or two out from shore to avoid the backwash as the seas were breaking far up on the rocks. I must confess I was very frightened and cannot understand why I did not capsize continually. The kayak was irresistibly swirled up and down, and sometimes I altogether lost sight of the other kayaks in the troughs of the waves. The following sea made it even worse, though it would have been quite impossible to travel against it. Waves would seize one from behind

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

and swirl over one breast-high, completely hiding the kayak and swinging it this way and that. I think I paddled on the right of the kayak the whole way, and even then it was absolutely all I could do to stop the wind and seas pulling it round.

When you are paddling a kayak you keep on passing the paddle to and fro in your hands so that as much of the blade as possible is under water at each stroke. My gloves were brand new and had been copiously soaked in blubber to make them waterproof. This made them very sticky, and as I passed the paddle through my hands it would sometimes stick, thus breaking the rhythm of the motion and almost upsetting me. Once this happened at the same moment as a wave hit me, and before I had time to do anything about it I was upside down. I came up again at once, without much difficulty, using the storm roll which brings one up in a steady position.

The natives say there is no danger of the kayak being damaged unless the waves actually break against the chest of the man. In parts of the extreme south of Greenland, where they are more used to kayaking in rough seas, when they see an exceptionally dangerous wave coming they capsize on purpose, take the wave on the bottom of the kayak instead of letting it hit them in the chest, and then when the wave is safely past they come up again with the paddle. In this district they can also go over endways on in the kayak, using a big wave to carry them over backwards, after which they come up again in the ordinary way. The great thing if you capsize in a big sea is not to drop your paddle. If two men only are there and one drops his paddle, after he has been helped up nothing can be done because the rescued man cannot be left without support, and in a stormy sea the two together cannot catch up with the paddle. Several lives have been lost in this way.

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

The sea got worse and worse, till by the entrance to the harbour it was terrific, enormous waves popping up sometimes right underneath the kayak. Lots of times I went over beyond the point of balance, but always managed to scull myself up before my head went under. I found it best to take short fast strokes, with the angle of the paddle well back, then at the end of each stroke I turned the paddle half over and steadied myself on it before the next stroke.

The two Eskimos were perfectly happy all the time; one of them even killed a Little Auk with his bird-dart right out in the middle of the fjord. I think one would have to kayak from childhood to be one-tenth as good as they are.

Once inside the harbour the chop disappeared but there was still a long, heavy swell. The *Kivioq* passed us here, and they said that even from her decks we sometimes went right out of sight.

People were very surprised when I reached the settlement—not the least myself.

The *Kivioq* has just come down from Kangerdlugsuak. Near Cape Dalton they found two bears. It was night-time, and as they particularly wanted to get some film of them they followed the bears in the *Kivioq* till the light was good enough for photography. However, by that time the bears were so exhausted that they lay down on the ice and slept. When the cameras were ready they had to wake the bears up by shooting round them with revolvers.

They have collected all our gear from Lake Fjord, which is very good of them as they are so pressed for time.

*September 3rd.* Calmer weather, but the sea is still very high.

The *Gertrud Rask* will be here in a few days' time and perhaps the *Nordstjern* too.

*September 4th.* The *Stella* arrived to-day. The

## CHIEFLY ABOUT KAYAKING

Norwegian fishing boat could not put to sea the day we kayaked over.

It was September 12th before the *Nordstjern* entered Angmagssalik Harbour, and then Captain Vedel told us he would not be able to get away before September 17th. While Riley was helping Rasmussen by running the *Stella* for him, Rymill and I went up to Sermiligak to map a branch of the fjord which they had been prevented by bad weather from visiting in the *Stella*. But we were equally unlucky; though we camped for three days beside the glacier we never once got a good view of it owing to low cloud and fog. Truly the weather on the east coast of Greenland is not to be depended upon!

On September 17th we joined the *Nordstjern* at her anchorage at the head of the fjord by the settlement. The *Nordstjern*, a schooner of about 200 tons, had been very well built originally, but was now getting rather old and battered. One mast had been removed at Reykjavik to make room for the expedition aeroplane, so she could carry little canvas, and as her engines only did 4 knots she was rather crippled in bad weather. Unfortunately there were violent easterly gales at this time, and for three days Captain Vedel dared not leave his moorings. At last, on September 20th, in a lull in the storm, we went outside, but soon afterwards the wind increased, and for a time the *Nordstjern* was driven backwards towards the rocky inhospitable coast. Soon, however, the wind swung round and blew with even greater violence from the west, and we rushed towards Iceland at as good a speed as we could wish.

As the *Nordstjern* was already taking about ten more than her proper complement of passengers it was extraordinarily kind of Captain Vedel to make room for us, though naturally he could not offer us much in the way of accommodation. We lay on the floor of a small room in the fo'c'sle, where the motion of the ship was a thing I still

## WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION

dream about. Together with a bucket, kitbags, books and ruc-sacks, we would all be heaped up in one corner of the cabin. Over the ship would go, and we would find ourselves in the opposite corner—and so it continued till we reached Reykjavik on the morning of September 24th. There we were just in time to catch the regular steamer to Hull, and four days later were in England.

THE END

**COMPLETE LIST  
OF ALL PENGUIN AND  
PELICAN BOOKS TO  
APRIL 1938**

**N B**

**NEW BOOKS MAY HAVE BEEN  
ADDED TO THE SERIES SINCE  
THIS BOOK WAS PRINTED. ASK  
YOUR BOOKSELLER FOR THE  
LATEST LIST**

**Penguin Books Limited**  
**HARMONDSWORTH MIDDLESEX**  
**ENGLAND**



# PENGUIN BOOKS

COMPLETE LIST OF PUBLICATIONS TO APRIL 1938

---

## FICTION *orange covers*

- 2 A FAREWELL TO ARMS by Ernest Hemingway
- 3 POET'S PUB by Eric Linklater
- 4 MADAME CLAIRE by Susan Ertz
- 8 WILLIAM by E. H. Young
- 9 GONE TO EARTH by Mary Webb
- 12 THE PURPLE LAND by W. H. Hudson
- 13 PATROL by Philip Macdonald
- 15 FOUR FRIGHTENED PEOPLE by E. Arnot Robertson
- 16 THE EDWARDIANS by V. Sackville-West
- 17 THE INFORMER by Liam O'Flaherty
- 19 THE STRANGE CASE OF MISS ANNIE SPRAGG by Louis Bromfield
- 23 ESTHER WATERS by George Moore
- 24 HANGMAN'S HOUSE by Donn Byrne
- 27 MY MAN JEEVES by P. G. Wodehouse
- 28 THE OWLS' HOUSE by Crosbie Garstin
- 39 THE WALLET OF KAI LUNG by Ernest Bramah
- 41 CROME YELLOW by Aldous Huxley
- 42 DEATH OF A HERO by Richard Aldington
- 43 A SAFETY MATCH by Ian Hay
- 44 A CUCKOO IN THE NEST by Ben Travers
- 45 THE GLEN O' WEEPING by Marjorie Bowen
- 47 THE LONELY PLOUGH by Constance Holme
- 48 A PASSAGE TO INDIA by E. M. Forster
- 49 THE JUNGLE by Upton Sinclair
- 50 THE W PLAN by Graham Seton
- 52 THE SPANISH FARM by R. H. Mottram
- 53 DUSTY ANSWER by Rosamond Lehmann
- 54 I AM JONATHAN SCRIVENER by Claude Houghton
- 57 THE BLACK DIAMOND by Francis Brett Young
- 59 THREE WIVES by Beatrice Kean Seymour
- 72 STILL SHE WISHED FOR COMPANY by Margaret Irwin

## COMPLETE LIST OF PENGUIN BOOKS

---

### FICTION (continued)

73 MR. WESTON'S GOOD WINE by T. F. Powys  
75 DECLINE AND FALL by Evelyn Waugh  
76 DANGEROUS AGES by Rose Macaulay  
80 THE DAWN OF RECKONING by James Hilton  
81 TARKA THE OTTER by Henry Williamson  
83 THE POACHER by H. E. Bates  
84 LOLLY WILLOWES by Sylvia Townsend Warner  
85 SIR ISUMBRAS AT THE FORD by D. K. Broster  
86 THESE CHARMING PEOPLE by Michael Arlen  
87 GREENERY STREET by Denis Mackail  
88 THE GREEN LACQUER PAVILION by Helen Beauclerk  
91 GHOST STORIES OF AN ANTIQUARY by M. R. James  
92 THE HAMPDENSHIRE WONDER by J. D. Beresford  
93 WILD STRAWBERRIES by Angela Thirkell  
94 SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE GREYHOUND by John Hampson  
95 THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY by G. K. Chesterton  
96 SELECTED MODERN SHORT STORIES selected by Alan Steele  
97 SOME EXPERIENCES OF AN IRISH R.M. by Somerville and Ross  
102 YOUTH RIDES OUT by Beatrice Kean Seymour  
103 A TALL SHIP by "Bartimeus"  
104 DEEP WATERS by W. W. Jacobs  
105 MANTRAP by Sinclair Lewis  
106 NOW EAST, NOW WEST by Susan Ertz  
107 PRIVATE WORLDS by Phyllis Bottome  
108 KAI LUNG UNROLLS HIS MAT by Ernest Bramah  
109 THE FIDDLER by Sarah Gertrude Millin  
112 CHILDREN OF THE EARTH by Ethel Mannin  
120 PENGUIN PARADE (I)—New Stories  
121-2 LEAN MEN by Ralph Bates (in two volumes)  
123 SOLDIERS' PAY by William Faulkner  
125 AN INDIAN DAY by Edward Thompson  
132 MR. PERRIN AND MR. TRAILL by Hugh Walpole

## COMPLETE LIST OF PENGUIN BOOKS

---

- 134 CARL AND ANNA and IN THE LAST COACH by Leonhard Frank
- 135 SEVEN RED SUNDAYS by Ramon J. Sender
- 136 VILE BODIES by Evelyn Waugh
- 138 SELF by Beverley Nichols
- 140 COLD COMFORT FARM by Stella Gibbons

## CRIME FICTION green covers

- 5 THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB by Dorothy L. Sayers
- 6 THE MURDER ON THE LINKS by Agatha Christie
- 34 MR. FORTUNE, PLEASE by H. C. Bailey
- 58 THE POISONED CHOCOLATES CASE by Anthony Berkeley
- 61 THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES by Agatha Christie
- 62 THE MISSING MONEYLENDER by W. Stanley Sykes
- 64 THE FOUR JUST MEN by Edgar Wallace
- 65 THE MAN IN THE DARK by John Ferguson
- 78 TRENT'S LAST CASE by E. C. Bentley
- 79 THE RASP by Philip Macdonald
- 89 THE DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE by Dorothy L. Sayers  
(with Robert Eustace)
- 90 THE SANFIELD SCANDAL by Richard Keverne
- 98 THE MURDERS IN PRAED STREET by John Rhode
- 101 MR. JUSTICE RAFFLES by E. W. Hornung
- 111 THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES by A. Conan Doyle
- 124 IT WALKS BY NIGHT by John Dickson Carr
- 127 THE HAVERING PLOT by Richard Keverne
- 131 TEN MINUTE ALIBI by Anthony Armstrong
- 137 DEATH AT SWAYTHLING COURT by J. J. Connington

## TRAVEL & ADVENTURE cerise covers

- 60 THE DARK INVADER by Captain von Rintelen
- 66 THE SURGEON'S LOG by J. Johnston Abraham

## COMPLETE LIST OF PENGUIN BOOKS

---

### TRAVEL & ADVENTURE (continued)

67 MY SOUTH SEA ISLAND by Eric Muspratt  
68 WITH MYSTICS AND MAGICIANS IN TIBET by Alexandra David-Neel  
69} SOME EXPERIENCES OF A NEW GUINEA RESIDENT  
70} MAGISTRATE by C. A. W. Monckton (in two volumes)  
82 UNDERTONES OF WAR by Edmund Blunden  
99} THE WORST JOURNEY IN THE WORLD : ANTARCTIC  
100} 1910-1913 by Apsley Cherry-Garrard (In two volumes)  
113 THE SECRET OF THE SAHARA by Rosita Forbes  
126 TRADER HORN by Alfred Aloysius Horn  
133 WATKINS' LAST EXPEDITION by F. Spencer Chapman  
139 FLYING DUTCHMAN by Anthony Fokker

### BIOGRAPHY & MEMOIRS *dark blue covers*

1 ARIEL by André Maurois  
7 TWENTY-FIVE by Beverley Nichols  
29-30 AUTOBIOGRAPHY by Margot Asquith  
71 CONFESSIONS AND IMPRESSIONS by Ethel Mannin  
77 GREY WOLF : MUSTAFA KEMAL by H. C. Armstrong  
110 DISRAELI by André Maurois  
114-115 FOCH : MAN OF ORLEANS by B. H. Liddell Hart  
128 LORD OF ARABIA : IBN SAUD by H. C. Armstrong

### MISCELLANEOUS *yellow covers*

116 ON ENGLAND by Stanley Baldwin  
118 WHILE ROME BURNS by Alexander Woollcott  
119 BILLIARDS AND SNOOKER FOR AMATEUR PLAYERS by  
Horace Lindrum  
129-130 THE WEEK-END BOOK (in two volumes)

### DRAMA *red covers*

117 SEVEN FAMOUS ONE-ACT PLAYS

### PENGUIN SPECIALS

S 1 GERMANY PUTS THE CLOCK BACK by Edgar Mowrer  
S 2—(to be announced)  
S 3—(to be announced)

## COMPLETE LIST OF PENGUIN BOOKS

---

### THE PENGUIN SHAKESPEARE

- B 1 TWELFTH NIGHT
- B 2 HAMLET
- B 3 HENRY THE FIFTH
- B 4 KING LEAR
- B 5 AS YOU LIKE IT
- B 6 A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
- B 7 THE TEMPEST
- B 8 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE
- B 9 RICHARD II

Specially edited for Penguin Books by Dr. G. B. Harrison.

- B 10 ROMEO AND JULIET
- B 11 JULIUS CAESAR
- B 12 MACBETH
- B 13 HENRY IV, part i
- B 14 HENRY IV, part ii
- B 15 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
- B 16 OTHELLO
- B 17 ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA
- B 18 THE SONNETS

Other volumes to follow shortly.

---

### PELICAN BOOKS *light blue covers*

A series of books on science, economics, history, sociology, archaeology, etc. Edited by V. K. Krishna Menon;—Advisory editors: H. L. Beales, Reader in Economic History, University of London; W. E. Williams, Secretary, the British Institute of Adult Education; Sir Peter Chalmers-Mitchell, Secretary of the Zoological Society, London, 1903-35.

- A 1 } THE INTELLIGENT WOMAN'S GUIDE TO SOCIALISM,  
  CAPITALISM, SOVIETISM AND FASCISM by Bernard
- A 2 } Shaw (in two volumes)
- A 3 LAST AND FIRST MEN by Olaf Stapledon
- A 4 DIGGING UP THE PAST by Sir Leonard Woolley (with  
  32 half-tone plates)
- A 5 A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WORLD by H. G. Wells  
  (*with numerous maps*)
- A 6 PRACTICAL ECONOMICS by G. D. H. Cole (first publica-  
  tion)
- A 7 ESSAYS IN POPULAR SCIENCE by Julian Huxley (illustrated)
- A 8 THE FLOATING REPUBLIC by Dobrée and Manwaring  
  (*The mutinies at the Nore and Spithead in 1797*)
- A 9 A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE (I) by Elie Halévy

## COMPLETE LIST OF PENGUIN BOOKS

---

### PELICAN BOOKS (continued)

A 10 THE MYSTERIOUS UNIVERSE by Sir James Jeans (with 2 half-tone plates)

A 11 THE GREAT VICTORIANS (I) edited by H. J. and Hugh Massingham

A 12 THE INEQUALITY OF MAN by J. B. S. Haldane

A 13 LIBERTY IN THE MODERN STATE by Harold J. Laski (with new introduction)

A 14 SOCIAL LIFE IN THE INSECT WORLD by J. H. Fabre (with 15 half-tone plates)

A 15 THE GROWTH OF CIVILISATION by W. J. Perry (with several maps)

A 16 A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE (II) by Elie Halévy

A 17 A BOOK OF ENGLISH POETRY collected by G. B. Harrison (a new anthology)

A 18 AFTER THE DELUGE by Leonard Woolf

A 19 MEDIEVAL PEOPLE by Eileen Power (with 8 half-tone plates)

A 20 VISION AND DESIGN by Roger Fry

A 21-2 AN OUTLINE OF THE UNIVERSE by J. G. Crowther (in two volumes, with numerous illustrations)

A 23 RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM by R. H. Tawney

A 24 THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE by Sigmund Freud

A 25-6 ONLY YESTERDAY by F. L. Allen (2 volumes, illustrated)

A 27 UR OF THE CHALDEES by Sir Leonard Woolley (with 16 half-tone illustrations)

A 28 CIVILISATION by Clive Bell

A 29 LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE by J. W. N. Sullivan

A 30 A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE (III) by Elie Halévy

More volumes to follow.

---

### N.B.

New volumes are continually being added to Penguin and Pelican Books. Please ask your bookseller for the latest list, as further volumes may have been issued since this book was printed. Suggestions of books for inclusion in the series are always welcome.



*“MANSION” gives her  
confidence to make  
friends welcome at all times*

There is no hesitation about her greeting for she has an easy mind concerning the appearance of her home. Every floor gleams with that brilliant loveliness which only “Mansion” can give; the furniture too has a highly polished, well-cared-for look. The invitingly fresh, clean and healthy atmosphere of the whole house is merely a matter of method—a matter of using “Mansion,” the care-free way to a polished home.

*Tins 3<sup>o</sup> 6<sup>o</sup> and larger sizes*

**MANSION POLISH**  
FOR FLOORS FURNITURE  
AND LINOLEUM

